

# JUDAISM

Churchill and Palestine

*David Lyon Hurwitz*

From *In the Garden of Delights*:

A New Translation of the Song of Songs

*Ariel Bloch & Chana Bloch*

Defilement of the Hands

*Michael J. Broyde*

Where God is Not

*David R. Blumenthal*

Who Knows Four: The *Imahot* in Rabbinic Judaism

*Alvan Kaunfer*

Bar Mitzvah in Szekesfehervar

*Peter Kenez*

Poetry by Alicia Ostriker and Elizabeth Rosner

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS

ISSUE No. 173 / VOLUME 44 / NUMBER 1 / \$6.00 **WINTER 1995**

## STATEMENT OF SPONSORSHIP

The American Jewish Congress is sponsoring JUDAISM: A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF JEWISH LIFE AND THOUGHT as part of its basic policy to stimulate an informed awareness of Jewish affairs, encourage Jewish scholarship and adequate opportunities for Jewish education, and generally foster the affirmation of Jewish religious, cultural, and historic identity.

JUDAISM, conceived as a free and non-partisan organ, is dedicated to the creative discussion and exposition of the religious, moral, and philosophical concepts of Judaism and their relevance to the problems of modern society.

Views and opinions expressed in the articles and reviews are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Editors or the American Jewish Congress.

## NOTICE TO AUTHORS

Articles, communications, comments and discussion are welcomed. Please send them to Professor Murray Baumgarten, Editor, JUDAISM, Kresge College, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064, on disk in either IBM or Macintosh format, preferably in Microsoft Word, with accompanying hard copy. Unsolicited contributions will be returned only if accompanied by appropriate postage. Upon acceptance by the editors, all copyright in and to such manuscripts will rest with JUDAISM, and authors agree that JUDAISM may copyright such articles in its own name. JUDAISM will publish only original articles which have not previously appeared elsewhere.

---

Material appearing in the pages of JUDAISM (except for brief passages cited for discussion) may not be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the Editors.

Articles published in this journal are abstracted and indexed in *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, *The Index of Jewish Periodicals*, *Humanities Index*, *Academic Index*, *Social Sciences Citation Index*, *General Periodicals on Disk*, and *Periodical Abstracts*. The full text of JUDAISM is also available in the electronic versions of the *Humanities Index*.

JUDAISM: A QUARTERLY JOURNAL is published by the American Jewish Congress. It appears four times a year, in January, April, July, and October. Office of Publication: 15 East 84th Street, New York, N.Y. 10028. Re-entered as second-class matter at Post Office, New York City, N.Y. 10028-0458. POSTMASTER: send address changes to JUDAISM, 15 East 84th Street, New York, N.Y. 10028-0458.

	U.S.	Subscription Rates Canada and Foreign	Institutions/Libraries
1 year	\$20	\$22	\$35
2 years	36	40	65
3 years	50	56	90
* Student	10	12	—

Single copies: for individuals, \$6.00; for institutions/libraries, \$10.00.

\* Orders and requests must be accompanied by valid, current student I.D.

All payments for subscriptions and mailings, whether in or outside the United States, must be paid for in American dollars and drawn on an American bank. Make checks payable to the order of JUDAISM, and send to 15 East 84th Street, New York, N.Y. 10028-0458.

Newsstand distribution in the United States by Bernhard DeBoer, Inc., 113 East Centre St., Nutley, N.J. 07011, Fine Print Distributors, 6448 Highway 290 East, Austin, TX 78723-1038, and Ubiquity Distributors, 607 Degraw St., Brooklyn, NY 11217.

US ISSN 0022-5762

Copyright © 1995 by the American Jewish Congress.

Camera-ready copy: Zoe Sodja, University of California, Santa Cruz.

Hebrew text: Gildas Hamel, University of California, Santa Cruz.

# JUDAISM

## A QUARTERLY JOURNAL

Issue No. 173 / Volume 44 / Number 1 / Winter 1995

### *Churchill and Palestine*

DAVID LYON HURWITZ 3

### ON THE SONG OF SONGS

From *In the Garden of Delights:*  
*A New Translation of the Song of Songs*  
*Collaboration, Computers, and Collegiality*

ARIEL BLOCH &  
CHANA BLOCH 36  
M. J. BROYDE &  
D. R. BLUMENTHAL 64

*Defilement of the Hands, Canonization of the*  
*Bible, and the Special Status of Esther,*  
*Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs*  
*Where God is Not: The Book of Esther and*  
*Song of Songs*

MICHAEL J. BROYDE 65  
DAVID R. BLUMENTHAL 80

### *Who Knows Four? The Imahot in* *Rabbinic Judaism*

ALVAN KAUNFER 94

### POETRY

*The Eighth and Thirteenth*  
*Ghosts*

ALICIA OSTRIKER 33  
ELIZABETH ROSNER 93

### FROM ALL THEIR HABITATIONS

*Bar Mitzvah in Szekesfehervar*

PETER KENEZ 104

### COMMUNICATIONS

from Jules Harlow, Joel Wolowelsky, Rochelle L. Millen,  
Robert Philipson, Michael Galchinsky, Bernhard Frank,  
Nechama Tamler, Seymour M. Panitz, Dvora Yanow,  
Joel H. Levy

115

AMBASSADOR UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY

PO Box 111  
Big Sandy, TX 75755

*Editor*

MURRAY BAUMGARTEN

University of California, Santa Cruz, California

*Contributing Editors*

EDWARD ALEXANDER, Seattle, Washington • ARNOLD J. BAND, Los Angeles, California  
• EUGENE B. BOROWITZ, New York, New York • WILLIAM M. BRINNER, Berkeley,  
California • SCOTT DAVID NOAM COOK, San Jose, California • EMIL L. FACKENHEIM,  
Jerusalem, Israel • MICHAEL FISHBANE, Chicago, Illinois • DAVID FLUSSER, Jerusalem,  
Israel • MARVIN FOX, Waltham, Massachusetts • MAURICE FRIEDMAN, San Diego,  
California • JUDAH GOLDIN, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania • JEFFREY S. GUROCK, New  
York, New York • SUSAN HANDELMAN, College Park, Maryland • MENAHEM HARAN,  
Jerusalem, Israel • RICHARD D. HECHT, Santa Barbara, California • ARTHUR HYMAN,  
New York, New York • ERICH ISAAC, Irvington, New York • ELAINE KAUVAR, New  
York, New York • MILTON R. KONVITZ, Oakhurst, New Jersey • ARTHUR J. LELYVELD,  
Cleveland, Ohio • ANNE L. LERNER, New York, New York • SOL LIPTZIN, Jerusalem,  
Israel • ANITA NORICH, Ann Arbor, Michigan • EMANUEL RACKMAN, New York, New  
York • ZALMAN M. SCHACHTER, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania • CLIVE SINCLAIR, St.  
Albans, England • DAVID WOLF SILVERMAN, Oakhurst, New Jersey • SHEMARYAHU  
TALMON, Jerusalem, Israel • DAVID WEISS HALIVNI, New York, New York • PAUL WEISS,  
Washington, DC • STEPHEN J. WHITFIELD, Waltham, Massachusetts • HANA WIRTH-  
NESHER, Tel Aviv, Israel • MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD, New York, New York •  
DVORA YANOW, San Jose, California • JAMES E. YOUNG, Amherst, Massachusetts

# Churchill and Palestine

DAVID LYON HURWITZ

ONE DAY IN LONDON HALF A CENTURY AGO I MET Herbert Samuel at his home on Porchester Terrace—I had a letter of introduction from my father. Another day I heard Winston Churchill speak in Parliament. These personal memories of men who had played central roles in the Palestine Mandate move me now to look back at that formative era, and consider what bearings it may have on territorial changes now under way.

On June 30, 1920, the British military administration of “Occupied Enemy Territory (South),” headquartered in Jerusalem terminated, and next day Sir Herbert Samuel assumed full control as first high commissioner of the Palestine Mandate. Then fifty, he had already achieved distinction—being the first professing Jew in the cabinet (starting 1909), holding office in the Liberal government nine years, and in late 1914 writing a memorandum to the cabinet entitled “The Future of Palestine,” which impressed Prime Minister Asquith, David Lloyd George (prime minister starting 1916), Lord Milner (then secretary for war), and Sir Mark Sykes (Middle East adviser), thus influencing the Balfour Declaration to come three years later.

Before the British general in command relinquished responsibility he asked the commissioner for a receipt for the territory being surrendered to him, and Samuel obliged with a note written by hand, “Received from Major General Sir Louis Bols one Palestine, complete. E.& O.E.”<sup>1</sup> When his term ended five years later, this eminent British public servant left a Palestine far from “complete,” in fact a remnant of the original Mandate, with over three-quarters of its territory stripped away, and the remaining land available for a “national home for the Jewish people” torn by Arab riots inflamed by a rabidly hostile grand mufti. What had happened to lead to the near dismantling of the Mandate and destruction of the Yishuv before they were hardly launched, with consequences to this day?

## A Hearty Welcome Home

What had happened was first that Winston Spencer Churchill came out to Cairo and Jerusalem in March 1921 to rearrange the Middle East. He had

---

DAVID LYON HURWITZ appeared in the Fall 1967 issue with a brief introduction to the address “My Faith as a Jew” which his father, the late Henry Hurwitz, editor of *The Menorah Journal*, had delivered at the Jewish Theological Seminary twenty-one years before. Retired from a career of research and writing on business subjects, he is compiling an index to the complete contents of *The Menorah Journal*, which was published for some forty-six years starting in 1915, and is also working on historical and biographical studies.



grown restless in his job as war secretary and air minister, and asked Lloyd George for a change. He wanted Exchequer, but his disastrous anti-Red forays in Russia had raised storms in war-weary England, and the prime minister had a less visible post in mind for him. They were New Year weekend guests at the retreat of Sir Philip Sassoon at Lympne on the coast near Dover, and Lloyd George sounded him out on the Colonial Office, which Lord Milner was leaving. Churchill accepted, and on February 15, 1921, went to work at Whitehall and Downing Street. He wrote cheerfully to his wife Clementine, then visiting in the south of France, "My new room is at least twice as big as the old one—an enormous square, but well warmed. It is like working in the saloon at Blenheim."

Blenheim Palace is where Churchill was born forty-six years before, son of Lord and Lady Randolph Churchill—she was the New York beauty Jennie Jerome. He was descended from the illustrious soldier John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, and from the 1st Earl Spencer. Graduate of Harrow and Sandhurst, adventurer in Cuba with Spanish general Campos, officer with the Malakand Field Force in India, cavalry commander under Kitchener in the battle of Omdurman in the Sudan, officer and prisoner in the Boer War, author and war correspondent, Tory member of Parliament, then Liberal, cabinet minister, early exponent of the tank, founder of the Royal Navy Air Service, colonel in the trenches in the first World War—these were already chapters in the colorful career of the new colonial secretary crackling with energy.

There was another element in his experience—from the days of his acquaintance with the Jews of Manchester, an early constituency. He acquired some rapport with Jews, rare in the English upper crust (Arthur Balfour was Scottish, Lloyd George Welsh), and they told him of Zionist dreams. He met and was impressed by Israel Zangwill and Baron Nathan Rothschild, and in 1908 wrote to a leader of Manchester Jewry:

I am in full sympathy with the historical traditional aspirations of the Jews. The restoration to them of a centre of true racial and political integrity would be a tremendous event in the history of the world. . . . Jerusalem must be the only ultimate goal. *When* it will be achieved it is vain to prophesy: but that it *will* some day be achieved is one of the few certainties of the future. . . .<sup>3</sup>

In 1904–5 he strenuously opposed restrictive legislation on immigration into England, which had chiefly barred Jews. He supported "Saturday closing" and "Sunday opening" bills for shops, and pressed for specific Jewish educational rights. Constraining these friendly feelings toward Jews and Zionism, however, were two leitmotifs in Churchill's credo, the first a loathing for "Bolshevism," about which he had in his earlier years an exaggerated notion of Jewish involvement.<sup>4</sup> Second was his devotion to empire, a loyalty against which support for Zionist hopes had always to be weighed.

Churchill had a historian's panoramic view, warm emotions, incredible facility in writing, matchless command of the English language, and the virile, resonant voice to make it soar. (I heard it from the visitors' gallery in the House of Commons in 1946.) He was an astute judge of men, an affectionate husband, a hard worker, an eager activist. He once said, "I am always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught."<sup>5</sup>

He learned his new duties quickly—aided, in fact, by his earlier experience as undersecretary. Even before moving in he took charge. First he annexed the Middle East to his bailiwick, so that Lord Curzon, foreign secretary, complained in a letter, "He wants to grab everything in his new Department & be a sort of Asiatic Foreign Secretary."<sup>6</sup> Then he brought in Thomas E. Lawrence as adviser. That Oxford don and explorer spoke fluent Arabic and had knocked about the desert before and during the war, spurring Arab revolt against the Turks, aiding Sherif Hussein and his son Emir Feisal. Supported by General Allenby he helped Feisal rout Turkish units east of the Jordan and advance on Damascus. Churchill and Lawrence hatched a plan for a postwar Middle East to serve imperial interests, please Arabs, avoid friction with France, and sharply cut British military occupation costs in both Mesopotamia and Palestine. "I am determined to save you millions in this field," he wrote Austen Chamberlain (older halfbrother of Neville), the new chancellor of the Exchequer. He set wheels in motion for a conference in the Middle East to which all British officials and generals in the area would be summoned.

The new colonial secretary already knew the drift of modern Middle East history, such as the success of Abdul Ibn Saud, descendant of Wahabi rulers, in seizing Riyadh, capital of Nejd, and in gaining independence from the Turks during the War. In 1916 Hussein Ibn Ali, grand sherif of Mecca, also revolted against the Turks, and proclaimed himself king of Hejaz—but when he went on to claim all Arabia for his Hashemite dynasty, Saud moved against him.<sup>7</sup> In the early postwar years two of Hussein's sons thought it prudent to look northward for new domains. Feisal, aided by Lawrence, was crowned "king" in Syria, but his brief reign was unceremoniously ended by the French, who had received the Syrian Mandate from the League of Nations.

Meanwhile the League assigned to Britain the Turkish vilayets of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra as the Mesopotamia Mandate, and the vilayet of Palestine, or southern Syria, as the Palestine Mandate. The latter covered all of "cis-Jordan"—the Mandate west of the river, and "Transjordan"—the portion east of it. Angered at France's treatment of Feisal, his older brother Abdullah rallied tribes in the Transjordan area and threatened to launch raids on Syria. The last thing England wanted was friction with France, and Churchill took on the task of keeping Abdullah contented in Transjordan.

In January 1921 the cabinet authorized Curzon to initiate secret talks with his brother to see if he cared for the throne in Mesopotamia.

Chaim Weizmann had in fact met with Feisal in Amman in 1918, and the latter—then leader of Arab nationalism—said there was ample room in the (as yet undivided) Palestine Mandate for joint development by Arabs and Jews. In 1919 the two signed an agreement speaking of “the closest possible collaboration,” and in a letter to Felix Frankfurter, a member of the American Zionist deputation at the Paris Peace Conference (March 1919), Feisal wished the Jews “a most hearty welcome home.”<sup>9</sup>

### **The Jordan as Natural Border**

Churchill knew this background, but sought further information and advice. Lawrence reported that Feisal visualized across the river “a recognized Arab State with British advice,” with Abdullah on the throne. A virtue of this, he said, was a clear and natural demarcation line, the River Jordan—with Jews continuing to settle west of it, and an Arab sovereign state on the east side.<sup>10</sup> The colonial secretary liked this reasoning, which accorded with earlier advice from General Congreve, commander in Egypt and Palestine, to give up the Mandate east of the Jordan, thereby saving occupation costs sharply.

On March 1, during Churchill’s last hours before departing for Cairo, Chaim Weizmann told the political committee of the Zionist Organization he was worried that Churchill, during his forthcoming visit to Cairo and possibly Jerusalem, might make drastic changes. He then rushed an appeal to him urging that the boundary of the Mandate within which the Jewish Home was to be established should at least be located as far east as the Hejaz railway (which ran north from Mecca straight up through Transjordan), though not disturbing Moslem interests. He pointed out that Britain and France had set the northern border of the Mandate to cut off the Litani river, which the Zionists had expected to harness for electricity and industry. (See map.) Compensating for that disappointment it was only fair that the Jewish Home area include at least the westernmost strip of the Transjordan territory, where in fact the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh “first pitched their tents and pastured their flocks.”<sup>11</sup> This eleventh hour appeal was foredoomed—the decision had been made to cut off all of Transjordan. Churchill did, however, decide to allow the Negev south of Beersheba to remain within the Mandate and open to Jewish settlement (rather than be allotted to Egypt)—hence Israel today reaches to Eilat and the Gulf of Aqaba.

Earlier Churchill had again written his wife, this time to suggest she come along, boarding the ship at Marseilles.

I expect there will be some lawn tennis, so do not forget your racquet. . . . I hope to paint a few pictures in the intervals between settling my business, and



naturally am taking all the right colours for the yellow desert, purple rocks and crimson sunsets. I shall enjoy so much showing you round: some of the places I know so well. Let me tell you who are coming with me. . . . Then the famous Colonel Lawrence, who has at last consented to have a bit put in his mouth and a saddle fastened on his back. . . . Samuel will very likely come across from Palestine and we shall travel back with him. . . .<sup>12</sup>

The Cairo Conference went like clockwork. Churchill had his way on most essentials.

On Saturday March 12 he impressed on all the advantages of his "Sherifian" plan for Hejaz, Mesopotamia, and Palestine. On Sunday the 13th he read to them the draft of a telegram he would send Prime Minister Lloyd George stating "I think we shall reach unanimous conclusion . . . that Feisal offers hope of best and cheapest solution."<sup>13</sup> On Monday the 14th the Conference agreed on drastic troop reductions in Mesopotamia. Next day protection of the Kurdish minority there was discussed. On Wednesday the 16th the conferees agreed on subsidies for both Ibn Saud and King Hussein. That evening the Churchills were guests at Lord Allenby's ball, and Samuel arrived from Jerusalem.

On Thursday the 17th Samuel formally objected to the Transjordan arrangement, but Churchill overruled him—Abdullah's reign there, encouraged and controlled by Britain, was essential to the broad plan decided on. Martin Gilbert, Churchill's official biographer, wrote "Herbert Samuel was out-argued and outmanoeuvred. . . . Abdullah's nomination was clearly inevitable." Friday came news of Bonar Law's resignation as Leader of the House of Commons—it was Churchill's luck to be in Cairo at this political juncture, but he stayed on. Next day he and General Congreve debated a possible Jewish role in a Palestine Defence Force. The general wanted Jews to serve only in a "gendarmarie"; Churchill favored a Jewish army. Congreve and Samuel discussed what uniform should be worn. (Nothing came of it—no Jewish gendarmarie or army was formed.)

Gilbert wrote, "The Cairo Conference discussions on Palestine and Transjordan were at an end. In three days two new Arab States had been created, their sovereigns chosen, and part of the Zionist case lost by default."<sup>14</sup> The term "by default" might be argued—Samuel did protest the Jordan partition, as had Weizmann when he first worried about the possibility in London a month before. But it was a fait accompli. That Churchill was patronizing in his private views of Samuel is obvious in certain written remarks. A photograph in the official Churchill biography is captioned "The Cairo Conference, March 1921," and shows him seated at front center surrounded by some three dozen other British gentlemen including Herbert Samuel to his right, Sir Percy Cox—high commissioner of Mesopotamia—to his left, Lawrence, many stern generals, one unidentified

man in fez, and—wearing a big bonnet—Gertrude Bell, the redoubtable Englishwoman who schemed in Mesopotamia and meant Faisal to be chosen for the throne during the Conference. One sympathizes with Samuel in this daunting assemblage, and in truth he looks a bit tense.<sup>15</sup> Then on Sunday March 20 the Conference adjourned (except for closing formalities Tuesday). Winston and Clementine went off with Lawrence and Miss Bell to see the Pyramids and were photographed on camels in front of the Sphinx. Churchill set up his easel and painted.

Wednesday the 23rd the Churchill entourage, along with Samuel and Lawrence, boarded the night train for Jerusalem. The purpose of the visit to western Palestine was to show the flag and impress on Abdullah what behavior was expected of him if he were to have an emirate across the river, his brother a kingdom in Mesopotamia, and their father in Mecca his *douceurs de la vie*. The firm decisions had been made months earlier on Churchill's initiative in London, with the Conference in Cairo serving chiefly to make sure the two high commissioners and all the generals understood the "Sherifian policy."

### **Zionist and Non-Zionist Areas of the Palestine Mandate**

The train reached Gaza next morning, March 24, and on Sunday March 27, in Jerusalem, the colonial secretary visited the British Military Cemetery on the Mount of Olives to honor British soldiers—over two thousand had given their lives to free Palestine from the Turks and were buried there. Meanwhile he had requested Samuel to meet Abdullah at Es Salt across the Jordan to brief him on British intentions and escort him to Jerusalem. There the two had tea, and later at dinner Samuel introduced the sheikh to Churchill, and they had their first conversation.

On Monday Churchill informed Abdullah of the plan for Transjordan to be an Arab province under an Arab governor responsible to the high commissioner in Jerusalem. The emir countered with an imaginative proposal that he should be emir of the entire territory on both sides of the Jordan. Churchill then got down to business. If he promised not to interfere with Zionist development in western Palestine and not to harass the French in Syria, then the Zionist provision of the Mandate "would not apply" east of the river.<sup>16</sup> So much for the hopes of Weizmann and other Zionist leaders for Jewish resettlement in Biblical Bashan and Gilead.

That same day an Arab delegation from Haifa was received by Churchill, who heard their demand that the principle of a National Home for the Jews be scrapped and Jewish immigration stopped. He answered

You have asked me to repudiate the Balfour Declaration and to veto immigration of Jews into Palestine. It is not in my power to do so, nor if it were



William Gordon David, Churchill College, Cambridge

*The Cairo Conference, March 1921*

*At front starting second from left: General Congreve, Sir Herbert Samuel, Winston Churchill, Sir Percy Cox. Directly behind Cox: Thomas E. Lawrence. Second from left, second row: Gertrude Bell.*



The Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem

*Jerusalem, a Few Days Later*

*Emir Abdullah, High Commissioner Samuel, Colonial Secretary Churchill*

in my power would it be my wish. . . . Moreover it is manifestly right that the Jews, who are scattered all over the world, should have a national centre and a National Home where some of them may be reunited. And where else could that be but in this land of Palestine, with which for more than 3,000 years they have been intimately and profoundly associated?

He said the Jewish National Home would create "increasing benefits and prosperity and happiness to the people of the country as a whole," adding

Why should this not be possible? You can see with your own eyes in many parts of this country the work which has already been done by Jewish colonies; how sandy wastes have been reclaimed and thriving farms and orangeries planted. . . . If instead of sharing miseries through quarrels you will share blessings through cooperation, a bright and tranquil future lies before your country. The earth is a generous mother. She will produce in plentiful abundance for all her children if they will but cultivate her soil in justice and in peace.<sup>17</sup>

Tuesday the 29th Churchill and Abdullah had their third session and it was again made clear to the emir that the French in Syria were not to be troubled by raids from the south. That afternoon Churchill visited the site of the Hebrew University being built on Mount Scopus, where Nahum Sokolow, the Zionist leader and Hebrew journalist, declared, "The Jews are not content to live [just] on terms of peace with the Arabs, but must live on terms of cordiality and fraternity." Churchill responded

Personally, my heart is full of sympathy for Zionism. This sympathy has existed since twelve years ago, when I was in contact with the Manchester Jews. I believe that the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine will be a blessing. . . . The hope of your race for so many centuries will be gradually realized here, not only for your own good, but for the good of all the world.<sup>18</sup>

On Wednesday the 30th the separation along the Jordan was made definite. At their final meeting Churchill informed the emir he would be given money and troops in return for his guarantee "that there should be no anti-French or anti-Zionist agitation in the country."<sup>19</sup> Abdullah accepted, and it was done. Norman Bentwich later wrote, "It was an improvised and almost careless creation of a State without any economic basis."<sup>20</sup>

The Palestine Mandate within which the national home for the Jewish people was meant to be established had measured 45,800 square miles, about the size of Pennsylvania. The new emirate occupied over 35,400 square miles, or 77 percent of it. The remaining area west of the river (including Judea and Samaria) was barely 10,400 square miles, or 23 percent of the Mandate—the size of Maryland (but unlike Maryland, about 70 percent desert). Coming down to our day, partitions confirmed by the ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House September 13, 1993, and



later agreements elsewhere, and being implemented daily, relate not to the Palestine of the Balfour Declaration and League of Nations Mandate, but to the 23 percent of it that was left after March 30, 1921.<sup>21</sup>

Technically and juridically, the Transjordanian emirate remained part of Palestine, under nominal control of the British high commissioner in Jerusalem, and officially the Mandate remained in force there. The device used to legitimize what the colonial secretary had done was to obtain from the League of Nations in September 1922 (two months after it officially confirmed the Mandate) an authorization "to postpone or withhold" the Jewish national home provisions "in the territories lying between the Jordan and the eastern boundary of Palestine." This was under Article 25 of the Mandate. It was only in May 1946 that the last legal thread between "trans-Jordan" and "cis-Jordan" (the Mandate west of the Jordan) was cut, and Abdullah's independent kingdom was recognized by the Attlee-Bevin government. The sheikh wanted to call his country "Palestine," but the Foreign Office had to demur, and trans-Jordan (or Transjordan) became the name.<sup>22</sup>

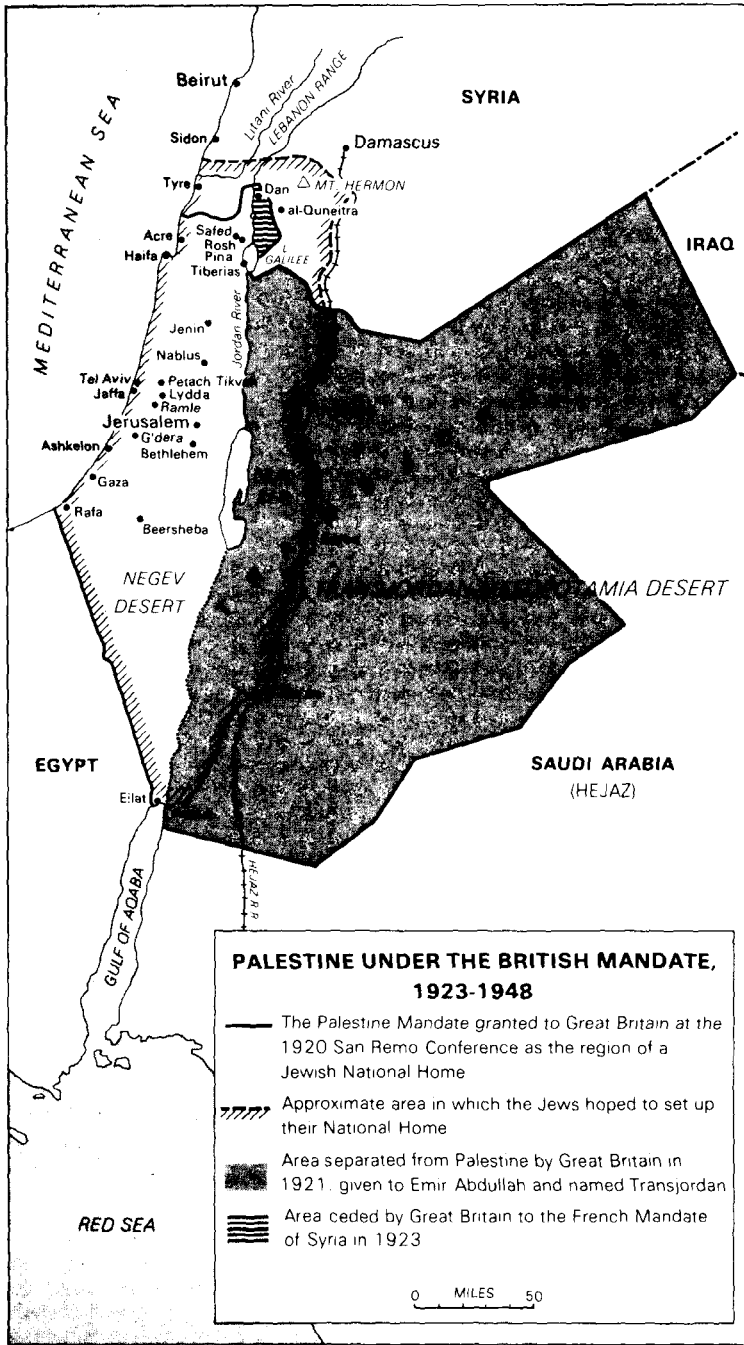
So Winston Churchill lopped off the entire territory east of the Jordan in 1921. It became closed to Zionist settlement, and has remained *Judenrein* ever since. That cannot negate the historic fact that it was an integral part of the Palestine Mandate within which, under international law, "a national home for the Jewish people" was to be reestablished after nearly two thousand years of exile.

One fruitful aspect of Churchill's week in Jerusalem was the acquaintance he made with Pinhas Rutenberg, electrical engineer and former anti-Bolshevik Russian revolutionary—a Zionist with the passion and persuasiveness of Weizmann. Churchill was much taken with his ambitious scheme of hydroelectric power based on the flow of the Yarmuk and the Jordan and related irrigation benefits for the entire region. Bentwich recalls "The corridors of Government House were decorated with Winston's canvasses on one side, and the drawings of Rutenberg's power station and irrigation works on the other. The legal complications of the concession were to occupy me for years, but with Churchill's help it was granted."<sup>23</sup>

Wednesday afternoon the 30th he visited Jewish centers on his way to the train that was to take him back to Alexandria, where he would sail for Genoa. At Tel Aviv Meir Dizengoff greeted him, declaring "This small town . . . has been conquered by us on sand dunes, and we have built it with our work and our exertions. It is in this manner that we are determined to render fruitful the land of our ancestors by work. . . ." The first mayor continued

We beg to request Your Excellency kindly to transmit to His Majesty King George the expression of our feelings of gratitude and of most absolute devotion. We shall never forget that it is due to the Declaration of Mr Balfour,





By permission, Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982)

and to the brilliant feat of Field Marshal Lord Allenby, that we owe the blessing of having here our High Commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel. Long live England!<sup>24</sup>

The party proceeded to Bir Yaakov, a small new settlement of Russian Jews busy building a road. With Rutenberg translating Churchill asked them if they were Bolsheviks. No, they were not, although they were devoted to the ideal of labor. They were building their society with self-help and physical exertion. Thus did this English blue blood gain an inkling of *chalutziyut*—the idealism of Palestine's Jewish pioneers. At nearby Rishon le-Zion he was so impressed as to declare on June 14 in the House of Commons

Anyone who has seen the work of the Jewish colonies . . . will be struck by the enormous productive results which they have achieved. I had the opportunity of visiting the colony of Rishon le-Zion . . . and there, from the most inhospitable soil, surrounded on every side by barrenness and the most miserable form of cultivation, I was driven into a fertile and thriving country estate, where the scanty soil gave place to good crops and then to vineyards and finally to the most beautiful, luxurious orange groves, all created in 20 or 30 years by the exertions of the Jewish community who live there. . . . I defy anybody after seeing work of this kind, achieved by so much labour, effort and skill, to say that the British Government, having taken the position it has, could cast it all aside and leave it to be rudely and brutally overturned by the incursion of a fanatical attack by the Arab population from outside. . . . I am talking of what I saw. All round the Jewish colony the Arab houses were tiled instead of being built of mud, so that the culture from this centre has spread out into the surrounding district. . . .<sup>25</sup>

### **Appeasement That Failed**

Herbert Samuel, well qualified in most respects for his key role in the crucial first years of Zion's rebirth, was handicapped perhaps by being too much the British gentleman, and by evident concern lest he lay himself open to the least charge of favoring his fellow Jews over militant Arabs. He was a man of refinement, letters and intellect (especially philosophy), not rough and tumble. Honor graduate of Balliol College at Oxford, his entire career had been in Parliamentary politics. He had no military toughening. Lloyd George chose him for the commissioner post in April 1920, when Churchill was still war secretary, and it might appear he and other ministers had in mind the consideration he later voiced to President Millerand during a visit to France before the Cairo conference. He recorded the thrust:

I expatiated on the virtues and experience of Sir Herbert Samuel, and pointed out how evenly he was holding the balance between Arabs and Jews and how effectively he was restraining his own people, as perhaps only a Jewish administrator could do.<sup>26</sup>

Then in reply to the Arab delegation in Jerusalem March 28 Churchill said

We regard our impartiality as so important that we moved His Majesty to appoint Sir Herbert Samuel as High Commissioner, who is well experienced . . . moreover he is a Jew and he can hold the balance fairly and cannot be accused by the Jews when not favoring them. . . .<sup>27</sup>

During his tenure Samuel tried to reconcile facilitation of Jewish development and appeasement of Arab militants. But Cecil Roth observed (1936) that Sir Herbert, "unimaginative as he was upright, demonstrated his impartiality by neglecting the section which he might have been expected to favour. The clause of the Balfour Declaration which safeguarded the rights of the existing inhabitants was observed more meticulously by far than the main proviso; and severe restrictions were placed upon Jewish immigration."<sup>28</sup>

Epitomized by the anti-Semite and Anglophobe Amin al-Husseini, the militants wanted nothing less than total halt to immigration and an end to the Jewish Home. In April 1920 Amin had aroused Arabs in the Old City with raving sermons in mosques about Jewish plans to destroy Moslem shrines—a familiar pattern that would repeat itself in future years with the unfailing success of medieval blood libels. A British military court sentenced him in absentia to fifteen years in jail for his part in the resulting violence. On petition by sheikhs meeting in Amman, Samuel amnestied him—and he thereupon was "elected" grand mufti of Jerusalem, with Samuel's official approval. Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, military adviser in Churchill's Middle East department, was furious—making Haj Amin the mufti "is sheer madness. . . . Sooner or later his appointment will be bitterly regretted by us."<sup>29</sup>

After Churchill's visit, more riots were fomented, starting in Jaffa and spreading to Rehovot, Petakh Tikvah and Khaderah, leaving forty-seven Jews murdered (including the Ukranian-born Hebrew writer Yosef Haim Brenner) and scores wounded. Samuel's reaction was to appease the Arab instigators by ordering a temporary halt in immigration and "negotiating" with them. Nor was this all. He created a Supreme Moslem Council, and in 1922 appointed Amin to head it, thereby bringing to this key position with government salary a militant Arab nationalist unalterably opposed to the Mandate, savagely hostile to Jews, and guilty of inciting murderous riots. The mufti of Jerusalem thus became, as the historian Ismar Elbogen wrote, "one of the most powerful men in the country and a man to be reckoned with in the entire Arab world." Of this "irreconcilable and unscrupulous opponent of the Balfour Declaration and of English policies" Elbogen said, "The British administration had nurtured an adder in its bosom."<sup>30</sup>

Samuel appeared to think that conciliating a strongman by putting him in power or appeasing him (he would later support Neville Chamberlain's Munich policy) might convert him to moderation and reasonableness. Experience has taught that this does not happen, whether it be a mufti, a *Führer*, a Khomeini, Saddam Hussein, or other. Norman Bentwich in his memoirs defended Sir Herbert, writing "He had a statesman's sense of the possible."<sup>31</sup> Indeed he impressed one as a kindly, intellectual patrician—tall and dignified: that is the recollection that lingers from meeting him in 1946 when, as a young ex-GI studying a year in London, I called on the viscount in his mansion near Kensington Gardens. (He had been elevated on the coronation of George VI in 1937.) One would wish to think the best of this distinguished Jew, but he had responded with weakness to Arab daggers and bluster. Roth wrote of the early Mandate years, "The tradition set in this formative period could not easily be reversed."<sup>32</sup> It was never reversed, it hardened. Before 1920 the Palestine situation had been fluid, and prospects for the Jewish national home bright; the new policy of rewarding terror with concessions introduced elements of ambivalence and compromise which Arab militants were quick to note and aggressive to exploit with ever growing success.

### **"A Great Cause"**

Churchill's speech in the House of Commons June 14, 1921, was a foretaste of his crucial and dramatic defense of the Mandate a year later. The intervening months were plagued with troubles in Palestine and growing opposition in Britain—developments which, without his patience and stubbornness, could have led Parliament to chuck the Mandate and let the Yishuv be swamped. (Even though the United States was not a member of the League of Nations, Curzon, Churchill, and Lloyd George once toyed with the thought of offering both Mandates to us—what would Warren Harding have made of this?—but on sober reflection quietly shelved the idea.)<sup>33</sup> The ferment in Palestine and controversy in London arose largely from the ambiguous wording of the Balfour Declaration of November 1917, and waning enthusiasm for its implementation as the Great War receded in time.

It was not Churchill whom Weizmann had earlier cultivated in the hopes of gaining Zionist friends in the government, but Balfour himself. He recalls his first conversation with each of the two. With Churchill it was in March 1916 when he was first lord of the Admiralty; Chaim found him "brisk, fascinating, charming and energetic." Almost his first words were "Well, Dr. Weizmann, we need thirty thousand tons of acetone. Can you make it?"<sup>34</sup>

Weizmann's first conversation with Balfour had taken place when he was standing in the 1906 general election to represent North Manchester.

The meeting had been arranged by a Jewish industrialist favoring the "Uganda scheme"—he hoped Balfour would win him over. The reverse happened. Balfour was intrigued by the idealism of the young Russian immigrant despite his imperfect English (he had been in England only two years—later his English became flawless and eloquent), and held him over an hour. But toward the end Chaim feared he had not sufficiently conveyed the Jews' devotion to Palestine as their ancient and eternally sacred land, and was inspired to ask, "Mr. Balfour, supposing I were to offer you Paris instead of London, would you take it?" "But, Dr. Weizmann," the Briton protested, "we *have* London." "That is true," answered the Zionist, "but we had Jerusalem when London was a marsh."<sup>8</sup> Eight years later Weizmann, now befriended by Herbert Samuel, saw Balfour again and they resumed their dialogue on Zionism. Once more Balfour was "greatly struck," according to his niece and biographer Blanche Dugdale, and asked if he could help in any practical way. "Not while the guns are roaring," Weizmann replied. "When the military situation becomes clearer I will come again." Balfour insisted on it. "Mind you come again. It is a great cause you are working for; I would like you to come again and again."<sup>9</sup>

Balfour became first lord of the Admiralty in Asquith's government, and it happened that Weizmann's war work in chemistry came under his aegis; one day they had a conference on technical matters, and at the end Balfour said as an afterthought, "You know, Dr. Weizmann, if the Allies win the War you may get your Jerusalem."<sup>10</sup> In December 1916 Lloyd George became the Coalition prime minister, and Balfour was needed as foreign secretary. The kaiser began unrestricted submarine warfare, which brought America in, and during April 1917 Balfour headed a British mission to Washington to arrange for close cooperation. His winning personality impressed all, and he was invited to address the House of Representatives, which he did on May 5.<sup>11</sup>

### Watered-Down Declaration

Back in London the biggest hurdle for Balfour, as for Lloyd George, Jan Smuts, and other pro-Zionists, was not anti-Jewish sentiment in Parliament or even Arab opposition. Mecca's Sherif Hussein and his sons, in fact, expressed no objection to a Jewish Home in Palestine, and never suggested that it breached any promise made by Sir Henry McMahon, Commissioner in Egypt 1914–16.<sup>12</sup> As for Lloyd George, he shared with Balfour an idealistic attachment to Zionist longing. A Welshman brought up in Carnarvonshire, grounded in the Old Testament, he was "a Nonconformist intrigued by the mystique of Jewish survival: the vision appealed to the romantic in him. . . ." He said "When Dr. Weizmann was talking of

Palestine he kept bringing up place names which were more familiar to me than those on the western front.”<sup>40</sup>

But prominent English Jews, by contrast, repudiated the idea of a Jewish national home. Some were motivated (like counterparts here today) by sincere dedication to a philosophical or “universalist” Judaism with no attachment other than poetic to the land of its origin. Others viewed Judaism in strict orthodox terms. Rich and, in some cases, titled Jews were concerned lest their recognition as irreproachable Englishmen be the least compromised by establishment of a Jewish land anywhere, the burden of a long polemic in the London *Times* by David Alexander and Claude Montefiore; it led the editors to respond, “Only an imaginative nervousness suggests that the realization of territorial Zionism would cause Christendom to turn round on the Jews and say: Now you have a land of your own, go to it.”<sup>41</sup>

Most formidable was the opposition of Edwin Montagu, secretary of state for India and hence in the government. In August 1917 he “opened his offensive,” according to Dugdale, “with a Memorandum of passionate protest. The cabinet was more than shaken. . . .”<sup>42</sup> The Declaration was issued despite all on November 2, but if Montagu could not block it altogether, he did succeed in weakening its terminology drastically. The Palestine declaration approved by the Foreign Office and prime minister had read: “Palestine should be reconstituted as the national home of the Jewish people.” The watered down version endorsed “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people. . . .”

Even thus blunted, the historic short letter to Lionel Walter Lord Rothschild was a worldshaking event. Jews here and abroad went wild. In Odessa a two-mile long procession of Jews filed past the British consulate, with *klezmer* bands alternately playing “God Save the King” and *Hatikvah*. By coincidence in Petrograd another event burst on the world scene at this very moment—Lenin and Trotsky took power. Mrs. Dugdale recorded that a high British official said regretfully if unrealistically, “A pity our Declaration did not come four months earlier. It might have made all the difference in Russia.” Lord Allenby was routing the Turks in the Gaza-Beersheba sector, and on December 9, 1917, “he dismounted from his horse outside the Damascus Gate to enter the Holy City on foot. . . .”<sup>43</sup>

Then in March 1921 Churchill arrived to bring the two Mandates into line with the “Sherifian policy” he and Lawrence had devised. Back in London he of course had other difficult issues—Ireland, for instance—but Palestine took much time and effort. Although now enthusiastic about Zionism and Jewish colonists, he faced career men in the Colonial and Foreign Offices and the army command who ranged from cold to hostile. An exception was his own departmental military adviser: Colonel Meinertzhagen in fact was angered by the detachment of Transjordan from the Mandate,



considering it a clear betrayal of Britain's pledge to the Jews, and protested vehemently to his boss:

I went foaming at the mouth with anger and indignation. Churchill heard me out; I told him it was grossly unfair to the Jews, that it was yet another promise broken and that . . . the Balfour Declaration was being torn up by degrees and that the official policy of H.M.G. to establish a home for the Jews in Biblical Palestine was being sabotaged; that I found the Middle East Department, whose business it was to implement the Mandate, almost one hundred per cent hebraphobe. I'm thoroughly disgusted.<sup>44</sup>

Next day Churchill, in an off-the-record conversation with a pro-Zionist journalist, expressed his admiration for the Jewish colonists. "Splendid open air men . . . beautiful women; and they have made the desert blossom like the rose." But in Palestine there were also thorns.

On May 1 came the Jaffa riots, and on the 3rd Samuel barred 162 Russian Jews from landing, which surprised even the Colonial Office. Churchill wired Samuel, "The present agitation is doubtless engineered in the hopes of frightening us out of our Zionist policy. . . . We must firmly maintain law and order, and make concessions on their merits and not under duress."<sup>45</sup> Samuel proposed that further Jewish immigration be governed by the "economic capacity" of Palestine to "absorb" new arrivals; Churchill warned against appearing to compromise the principle of the Jewish National Home. In his well-received June 14 speech in Commons he reaffirmed his policies, going so far as to insist

We cannot possibly agree to allow the Jewish colonies to be wrecked, or all future immigration to be stopped, without definitely accepting the position that the word of Britain no longer counts.<sup>46</sup>

But Weizmann was becoming uneasy over what he considered temporizing—to the extent that Balfour arranged for a meeting at his London home attended by the prime minister and Churchill as well as Weizmann. The latter complained that the Declaration was being whittled away, Samuel was undermining it, and an ultimate Jewish majority was being ruled out. Lloyd George and Balfour both reassured him that by the Declaration "they had always meant an eventual Jewish State."<sup>47</sup>

An Arab delegation led by Musa Kazim Pasha set up shop in London, determined to subvert the Declaration altogether; Churchill received but rebuffed them, at one point suggesting that they confer with Weizmann. Pasha retorted: "We do not recognize Dr. Weizmann." Churchill's patience ran out and he stated bluntly

The British Government mean to carry out the Balfour Declaration. I have told you so again and again. I told you so at Jerusalem. I told you so at the House of Commons the other day. I tell you so now. . . . It contains safeguards for the

Moslems, just as it contains clauses satisfactory for the Jews. . . . They have done a great deal for the country. They have started most thriving colonies, and many of them wish to go and live there. It is to them a sacred place. . . . Give the Jews their chance to come and develop the country. . . .<sup>48</sup>

Then he arranged for strengthened policing in Palestine, and spoke of a "reserve force of Jews . . . armed with machine guns" to defend their settlements against Arab marauders. He overruled Samuel who wanted to delay the Rutenberg electrification and irrigation projects, and authorized the needed Auja and Jordan River hydroelectric concessions. This was a major step toward developing the economic basis for Palestine.

Still obstacles mounted. General Congreve declared unofficially that "he and all his officers were certainly under the impression that His Majesty's Government were in the hands of the Zionist Organization." Samuel wanted Jewish immigration limited to "the labouring classes," all Zionist political work stopped, and the goal of a Jewish State renounced. When he reacted to Arab hostility by waiving fines levied for fomenting riots, Meinertzhagen wrote that Samuel was quite simply "afraid."<sup>49</sup>

The commissioner's declaration that "the economic capacity of the country to absorb labour remains at present small" was self-fulfilling pessimism. (What was the "economic absorptive capacity" of New Amsterdam?) His ultracautious recommendations became the basis of the June 1922 White Paper, sometimes called the Churchill White Paper, but Samuel's drafting. It reaffirmed the Balfour Declaration and did state that the Jews were in Palestine "as of right and not on sufferance," but the positive spirit of Balfour and Lloyd George was gone. The detachment of the Transjordan territory from the area of Zionist settlement was made official, but there was not one word about Jewish rights and claims in western Palestine now being all the more defensible precisely *because* of that creation of a much larger all-Arab state in the Mandate territory east of the Jordan.<sup>50</sup> On the contrary, the White Paper said that "The Zionist Home must and does not mean the predominance of political power on the part of the Jewish community in a country [western Palestine only] where the population is predominantly non-Jewish"—and was meant to remain so thanks to this kind of statement contrary to the Declaration, and the reduction of Jewish immigration to a trickle.

Zionists read the White Paper with a heavy heart. Weizmann wrote

It was as little realized in 1922 as it is today that the real opponents of Zionism can never be placated by any diplomatic formula; their objection to the Jews is that the Jews exist, and in this particular case, that they desire to exist in Palestine. It made, therefore, little difference whether our immigration was large or small: protests were as vociferous over a hundred immigrants as over thousands. . . .<sup>51</sup>

### No Israelite Need Apply

Arthur Balfour, now lord president of the Council in Lloyd George's government, returned to the United States for the Washington Disarmament Conference of winter 1921–22, where he was the leading figure after Secretary of State Hughes. In the spring his long services to his country were recognized when he was knighted and created earl by King George V (he chose the title Balfour, the ancient cradle of the family in Fife), and on June 21 made his maiden speech in the House of Lords. In the debate on Palestine, Lord Islington moved that the Palestine Mandate was “unacceptable to this House,” being “opposed to the . . . great majority of the people . . . Zionism runs counter to the whole human psychology of the age.” The Rutenberg scheme should be rejected.

Balfour's rejoinder remains to this day the transcendent philo-Semitic utterance by a leading statesman. “I do not deny that this is an adventure,” he said of the Declaration he had championed and signed.

Are we never to have adventures? Are we never to have experiments? . . . Surely it is in order that we may send a message to every land where the Jewish race has been scattered, a message that will tell them that Christendom is not oblivious of their faith, is not unmindful of the service they have rendered to the great religions of the world and most of all to the religion that the majority of your Lordships' house profess, and that we desire . . . to give them that opportunity of developing, in peace and quietness under British rule, those great gifts which hitherto they have been compelled to bring to fruition in countries that know not their language and belong not to their race. That is the ideal which I desire to see accomplished . . . and though it be defensible indeed on every ground, that is the ground which chiefly moves me.

Earlier he had cited a compelling reason for the “message” to be sent to every land about the Jews:

. . . but consider—it is not a present consideration, but it is one that we cannot forget—how they have been treated during long centuries which in some parts of the world extend to the minute and the hour in which I am speaking; consider how they have been subjected to tyranny and persecution; consider whether the whole culture of Europe, the whole religious organization of Europe, has not from time to time proved itself guilty of great crimes against this race. . . .<sup>52</sup>

Balfour was speaking not in 1945 but in 1922. The following year in November came the beer hall *Putsch* in Munich, and then a crime neither Balfour nor any other civilized person could then have conceived.

After Balfour concluded his speech, which included strong defense of the Rutenberg concession, Lord Sydenham spoke against the Jewish Home in Palestine, complaining “we have dumped 25,000 promiscuous

people on the shores of Palestine, many of them quite unsuited for colonizing purposes, and some of them Bolsheviks, who have already shown the most sinister activity. . . . The Mandate will undoubtedly transfer control of the Holy Land to New York, Berlin, London, Frankfurt and other places” and for this “we shall be responsible.”<sup>53</sup> When the vote was taken he and the other anti-Zionists prevailed 60 to 29. But this was only a token setback: the decisive contest was to come in Commons on July 4 in the evening, and Churchill won it. The air in the Chamber was expectant—word was passed in the smoking-room “Return to hear Winston on Zionism.”

He was in top form. First he had a little fun—needling the above honorable lord who had besmirched the Jewish pioneers two weeks earlier. He quoted Sydenham’s own words during the War: “I earnestly hope,” he had then said, “that one result of the War will be to free Palestine from the withering blight of Turkish rule, and to render it available as the national home of the Jewish people, who can restore its ancient prosperity.” Churchill was armed also with earlier statements by members of Commons who had that very evening denounced the Jewish Homeland. One, who “has just addressed us in terms of such biting indignation was [in 1917] almost lyrical on the subject,” declaring

I trust the day is not far distant when the Jewish people may be free to return to the sacred birthplace of their race, and to establish in the ancient home of their fathers a great, free, industrial community where, safe from all external aggression, they may attain their ideals, and fulfil their destiny.<sup>54</sup>

Having exposed these inconsistencies, Churchill called on the House to

stand faithfully to the undertakings which have been given the name of Britain, and interpret in an honorable and earnest way the promise that Britain will do her best to fulfil her undertakings to the Zionists.

He then befriended the Rutenberg plan, pointing out that it offered to *all* Palestinians “the assurance of great prosperity and means of a higher economic and social life,” and went on

Was not this a good gift which the Zionists could bring with them . . . which would impress . . . on the Arab population that the Zionists were their friends and helpers, not their expellers and expropriators . . . ? I am told that the Arabs would have done it themselves. Who is going to believe that? Left to themselves, the Arabs of Palestine would not in a thousand years have taken effective steps toward the irrigation and electrification of Palestine. . . . It has been stated tonight that “streams of applications” were coming in from Arabs and British. No stream of applications was coming in. At the time the Rutenberg concession was granted, no other application was before us.

Churchill lauded the Palestinian entrepreneur, citing his qualifications, backing by Baron Edmond de Rothschild, detailed blueprints—and also the noncommercial aspect of the whole project, financed in large part by Jewish philanthropy. Speaking directly to anyone who might harbor anti-Jewish bias, he said of Rutenberg

He is a Jew. I do not see why that should be a cause of reproach. It is hard enough . . . to make a New Zion, but if, over the portals of the new Jerusalem, you are going to inscribe the legend, “No Israelite need apply,” then I hope the House will permit me to confine my attention exclusively to Irish matters.

He concluded defense of the Mandate by citing economies his policies had achieved, and said surely the moderate sum now required was not too much to pay “for the control and guardianship of this great historic land.”<sup>55</sup>

The House divided, and the vote was 292 to 35 in favor of the government’s position. That enabled Britain to present final terms of the Mandate to the League of Nations, which on July 22 approved it.<sup>56</sup> At the ceremony of ratification by the Council of the League meeting at St. James Palace on July 24, Lord Balfour declared, “I most firmly believe that for the Arab population, as for every other section of the population in Palestine, a new era of prosperity is going to open with the beginning of the new regime,” and he proved correct.<sup>57</sup>

Churchill’s July 4 tour de force suggests that had he remained in control at the Colonial Office, or even stayed in Parliament, he might have influenced future events in Palestine for the better. There was a hint in his speech of the indomitable will to flower some sixteen years later, and we may be thankful it did when the time came and a sword of Damocles hung by a hair over humankind. But a disadvantage of democracy is that it is unpredictable, and Churchill’s short term as colonial secretary, begun in early 1921, ground to a halt in late 1922. Lloyd George’s Coalition fell apart, Bonar Law became Conservative prime minister, and a general election was called for November 15. Once again the timing was wrong for Winston—now he was stuck not in Cairo as in March 1921, but in a hospital bed with appendicitis. “In the twinkling of an eye,” he later sighed, “I found myself without an office, without a seat, without a party and without an appendix.” Ashen and weak he dragged himself to Dundee to campaign from a chair as a Liberal who knew foreign affairs. The workers were more interested in money than Mandates, and Churchill came in fourth. At age forty-eight he was back in the wilderness.

He stayed there only long enough to regain his stride—painting and writing history in the south of France (his massive *The World Crisis* on the

Great War and other monumental works would later win him a Nobel prize for literature); yachting; bricklaying and raising a family at Chartwell; then standing for Parliament again, winning as a Tory, and in November 1924 becoming chancellor of the Exchequer in Stanley Baldwin's first government. Epping remained his constituency from then on, but not for fifteen years did his commanding voice again resound in the House of Commons on Palestine matters, and by then the second and this time apocalyptic "world crisis" had engulfed civilization.

### **A Jewish Ghetto in an Arab Land**

Lord Plumer, who had succeeded Sir Herbert as high commissioner in 1925, was a no-nonsense professional soldier, and his term marked the quietest period of the Mandate. He refused to restrict immigration; the Va'ad Le'umi was recognized as the representative body of the Yishuv; the Jewish Agency for Palestine was enlarged; roads were built and Haifa port begun. On Mount Scopus construction of Hebrew University advanced—the outdoor inauguration had taken place April 1, 1925 toward the close of Samuel's term, in a setting of awesome grandeur, with Lord Balfour in his scarlet robes of Cambridge University chancellor delivering a panegyric to Hebrew letters and Jewish intellect.<sup>59</sup>

But Plumer's successor was ineffective. While he was absent from the country there occurred the bloodiest massacre of Jews in the Holy Land since the Crusades. Arab violence started at the Western Wall in Jerusalem at the time of Tisha b'Av (August 15, 1929); unrest was fanned by Arab newspapers and mullahs (the Jews intended to destroy Muslim holy places); a week later Arab bands armed with knives and clubs gathered at the al-Aqsa mosque where they were whipped up by the mufti and then went on a rampage of looting and murder in the Jewish quarter only stopped by small mobile British units and Haganah. The worst came at Hebron on Shabbos the 24th, when the small, utterly defenseless community of the "Old Yishuv" was set upon as if by Chmielnicki's Cossacks, and 70 men, women, children and infants were killed—hacked to pieces by Arabs screaming "*Itbach al-Yahud—slaughter the Jews!*"<sup>60</sup> Violence spread even to Safed. Edwin Samuel, son of Herbert and on the scene, later reported, "In spite of *Hagana* self-defence units, by the end, no less than 133 Jewish men, women and children were butchered and 339 wounded."<sup>60</sup> In this country Henry Hurwitz wrote,

The grief in which a Jew begins to write of the catastrophe in Palestine is not grief and commiseration for the individual victims only. It is horrible to think of the torture and slaughter of defenseless old men and women, girls, young



students in a yeshivah, peaceful colonists. Did these things happen in some dark country of Eastern Europe, in Tsarist days, or during a general conflagration of war, it would be cruel and piteous, but nothing new. But that such happenings should be in time of peace, under the flag of a civilized power, and in Eretz-Israel of all lands—such a new concatenation in Jewish history seems too tragic, too ironic, to be borne.<sup>61</sup>

The flag of civilized Britain barely fluttered in the Mandate. Edwin Samuel wrote, "The trouble lay in the fact that Palestine had been almost completely denuded of British troops and British police."<sup>62</sup> More fundamental probably was that there was now no one of sinew and resolve in charge—no Churchill of Britain's finest hour or Golda Meir of a later steadfast time.<sup>63</sup> The Shaw report of March 31, 1930, blamed Jewish victims as much as Arab rioters. Then the Colonial Office suspended Jewish immigration. On October 20 Sir John Simpson issued a ponderous report on his investigations, which "proved" there was no basis for significant industrial growth in Palestine, and room for only 50,000 more Jewish immigrants. The same day the colonial secretary, Lord Passfield (Sidney Webb), issued his White Paper, which reduced Britain's Mandate pledge to a shadow.

In protest Weizmann resigned as president of the Jewish Agency, while Alfred Mond and Felix Warburg also quit their leadership roles. In New York the Zionists Jacob De Haas and Rabbi Stephen Wise wrote an impassioned denunciation of British policy with the title *The Great Betrayal*.<sup>64</sup> But there had come a new pharaoh who knew not Joseph: noble Balfour had died in March,<sup>65</sup> and Churchill was again out of office (after Baldwin's resignation in May 1929).

Then in 1931 the Labour prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, had a change of heart and downplayed the White Paper; with the arrival of the new high commissioner—Arthur Wauchope (another Scot)—the air cleared. His fairness to Arabs did not preclude sympathy for Jewish aspirations, and immigration increased. But in 1936 the mufti launched his violent general strike and revolt against the British, accompanied by terror against Jews; other Arab militants also watched with satisfaction the rise in power of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, and were emboldened. Armed mercenary bands led by al-Qawukji (who postured in admiration of his hero Hitler) roamed the land murdering settlers by night and sabotaging their farms. Chalutzim had to adopt a frontier-style settlement pattern, building "tower and stockade" outposts overnight.<sup>66</sup> Arab leaders insisted that Jews could never expect more than limited minority status living on sufferance in an Arab land. This was not what Jews had yearned and daily prayed for during nineteen centuries of exile. In June 1937 Weizmann wrote the high commissioner:

Jews are not going to Palestine . . . to exchange their German or Polish ghetto for an Arab one. Whoever knows what Arab Government looks like, what "minority status" signifies nowadays, and what a Jewish ghetto in an Arab state means . . . will be able to form his own conclusions as to what would be in store for us in these "solutions." It is not for the purpose of subjecting the Jewish people, which still stands in the front rank of civilization, to the rule of a set of unscrupulous Levantine politicians that this supreme effort is being made in Palestine. . . . Could there be a more appalling fraud on the hopes of a martyred people than to reduce it to ghetto status in the very land where it was promised national freedom?<sup>67</sup>

A Royal Commission under Lord Peel had investigated and found that the one-sided policies of the Colonial Office contradicted the spirit of the Balfour Declaration; in its 400-page report of July 1937 with many maps and statistics it recommended partition of the remaining Mandate, the Jewish area the size of Delaware. In desperation Zionist leaders accepted the proposed narrow confines in the hope at least of providing asylum for doomed European Jews whose only refuge could be Palestine (no other country wanted them). Abdullah across the Jordan liked the scheme, hoping to incorporate the proposed Arab state into his kingdom, but was overruled by obdurate Arab chiefs who *insisted on outright rejection of any partition proposal*. The Woodhead Commission then sought to squeeze the Jewish pale of settlement into a sliver along the coastal plain—less than 1 percent of the original Mandate,<sup>68</sup> and in May 1939, Lord Halifax, Neville Chamberlain's foreign secretary, issued another White Paper which was even harsher than Passfield's document nine years earlier and virtually annulled the Balfour Declaration. (It was called the MacDonald White Paper after the colonial secretary Malcolm MacDonald.) Churchill was outraged.

### **"The Vision . . . The Hope . . . The Dream . . ."**

Starting in 1933 the member for Epping had cautioned with mounting urgency that Nazi Germany was approaching, then surpassing, Britain in military strength, particularly in the air, and the country was perilously neglecting its defenses.<sup>69</sup> Ostracized from public office, he became a Cassandra—an annoying troubler in Commons—warning of peril when complaisance reigned and most would not see on the horizon a cloud as small as a man's hand. He was accused of war mongering. When he pleaded that the air force be doubled and redoubled, Herbert Samuel (leader of the Liberal Opposition) ridiculed him as "a Malay running amok." In 1935 Sir Samuel Hoare, then foreign secretary, mocked those who "seem to take a morbid delight in alarms and excursions, in a psychology, shall I say, of fear."<sup>70</sup> Even two years later his warnings were

brushed aside: Lord Halifax, who had visited Hitler at Berchtesgaden and “found friendliness and a desire for good relations,” became foreign secretary in 1938 and scoffed at the worry of a German “lust for conquest on a Napoleonic scale.”<sup>71</sup> In September the Führer ranted to a huge regimented crowd in the Berlin Sportspalast that Sudetenland was “the last territorial demand I have to make in Europe. We do not want a lot of Czechs!” and the horde screamed their Heils, harbinger of *schrecklichkeit* to come. Three days later Chamberlain (prime minister starting 1937) and Edouard Daladier bowed to him and Mussolini in Munich and agreed to that “last territorial demand” (which sealed the fate of the 350,000 Jews of Czechoslovakia); he flew back to England, at the airport flourished the sheet of paper he and Hitler had signed, waved to the multitudes in the streets hysterically cheering, and then from his window declared that “there has come back from Germany to Downing Street peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time.”<sup>72</sup>

On October 3 in a hushed House of Commons, Churchill did not cheer: “I will begin by saying what everybody would like to ignore or forget but which must nevertheless be stated, namely that we have sustained a total and unmitigated defeat . . . we have sustained a defeat without a war . . . [Our loyal, brave people] should know that the terrible words have . . . been pronounced against the Western democracies: ‘Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting.’ Do not suppose this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning. This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year by year...”<sup>73</sup> On November 17, a week after *Kristallnacht* wrote finis to the great Jewish community of Germany, Churchill was again a nuisance and tiresome dissenter, demanding in Commons: “Is not this the moment when all should hear the deep, repeated strokes of the alarm bell, and when all should resolve that it shall be a call to action, and not the knell of our race and fame?”<sup>74</sup> Six months later Hitler tore up the scrap of paper and the Wehrmacht occupied all of Czechoslovakia.

Such was the broader setting within which the debate on the MacDonald White Paper took place in Commons in May 1939. Churchill denounced it. “There is much in this White Paper which is alien to the spirit of the Balfour Declaration”—for one thing “the decision that Jewish immigration can be stopped in five years’ time by the Arab majority.” He continued

This is a plain breach of a solemn obligation. . . . What sort of National Home is offered to the Jews of the world when we are asked to declare that in five years’ time the door of that Home is to be shut and barred in their faces? The idea of home to wanderers is, surely, a place to which they can resort. . . . Now, there is the breach; there is the violation of the pledge; there

is the abandonment of the Balfour Declaration; there is the end of the vision, of the hope, of the dream. . . . We are now asked to submit—and this is what rankles most with me—to an agitation that is fed with foreign money and ceaselessly inflamed with Nazi and Fascist propaganda.<sup>75</sup>

The Chamberlain faction prevailed, the White Paper was confirmed.

Then on September 3, Britain was at war with Germany, and Churchill again became first lord of the Admiralty. David Ben-Gurion declared to Mapai's Central Committee, "We must support the [British] army as though there were no White Paper, and fight the White Paper as though there were no war."<sup>76</sup> In Palestine 136,000 Jewish volunteers immediately registered for national service under the British flag—practically the entire Yishuv between ages eighteen and fifty. On May 10, 1940, Churchill was prime minister. In his first radio address as war leader he spoke to the world of the "shattered nations and bludgeoned races . . . upon all of whom the long night of barbarism will descend, unbroken even by a star of hope, unless we conquer, as conquer we must; as conquer we shall."<sup>77</sup>

At age thirteen, Winston's first essay at Harrow dealt with Palestine at the time of Roman tyranny, and he wrote that the Zealots were always "ready to risk their lives, their homes, their all for their country's freedom."<sup>78</sup> A half century later came his own hour to be zealous in defense of his country's freedom and ours. How nobly he rose to the challenge is engraved in the hearts of those who care to read and remember.

## NOTES

1. Jerusalem State Archives.

2. Martin Gilbert, *The Stricken World 1916–22* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), p. 530. This volume is the fourth in the monumental official biography of Churchill, of which all but the first two are by Gilbert. Together with the documentary companion volumes, his biography provides the primary standard source for the man's life and times, apart from the massive works—partly autobiographical, partly historical, by Churchill himself, and apart from the archival repositories in England. The companion volumes contain complete or lengthy verbatim copies of innumerable documents, and Gilbert cites the precise archival source (Central Zionist Archives, Churchill papers, Balfour papers, etc.) or definitive publication (such as the Hansard parliamentary proceedings). A consolidated (and at points amplified) biography is Gilbert's one-volume *Churchill, a Life* (in England: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1991; in New York: Henry Holt, 1991), 1066 pp. I have not consulted Churchill's own work in the present connection, mainly because he himself deals little with the primary subject of this article.

3. Martin Gilbert, "Churchill and Zionism," lecture March 13, 1974, Hillel House, London, published by the World Jewish Congress, British Section, p. 4.

4. This misconception was based largely on the role of Leon Trotsky in routing the White generals Yudenich and Deniken.

5. F. B. Czarnomski, *The Eloquence of Winston Churchill* (New York: Signet, 1957).

6. Gilbert, *Stricken World*, op. cit., p. 528.
7. Ibid., p. 531.
8. By 1924 Saud would capture Mecca, depose Hussein, and become king of Hejaz, then ruler of the combined kingdom of Nejd and Hejaz, after which the name of his land would be Saudi Arabia.
9. Aryeh Rubinstein, *The Return to Zion* (New York: Leon Amiel, 1974), p. 67. Lawrence of Arabia himself was well disposed toward the Balfour Declaration despite a romantic identification with the desert tribes he mythicized.
10. Gilbert, *Churchill, a Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991), p. 432.
11. Gilbert, *Stricken World*, op. cit., pp. 540–1. Cf. Joshua chapter 13, verses 1–32.
12. Ibid., pp. 534–5.
13. Ibid., p. 546. (This is chapter 31, “The Cairo Conference,” the source of the summary that follows.)
14. Ibid., pp. 553, 555.
15. To cap things off, there were also a few feet from Sir Herbert two young lions from the Sudan destined for the London zoo, with their native handler; how they got into this official Conference photograph is not revealed.
16. Gilbert, op. cit., p. 561. (This is chapter 32, “Visit to Jerusalem.”)
17. Ibid., pp. 564–6.
18. Ibid., pp. 570–1.
19. Ibid., p. 572.
20. Norman Bentwich, *My 77 Years, an Account of My Life and Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1961), p. 70. Bentwich was attorney-general in Palestine 1920–31, then for twenty years professor of international relations at the Hebrew University.
21. Lord Balfour, speaking in 1920 of the original Palestine Mandate of some 46,000 square miles, characterized it as “that small notch” midst the vast Arabian domains. (July 12, 1920, Royal Albert Hall, London.) Earl of Balfour, *Speeches on Zionism*, with foreword by Sir Herbert Samuel (London: Arrowsmith, 1928), p. 24. The Arab areas such as Balfour may have had in mind are these:—Totaling those of Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and present Jordan, the figure is about one-and-a-half million square miles. Adding the remaining countries of the Arabian peninsula, and the Arabic-speaking countries of north Africa, the Arab total exceeds 4.6 million square miles. (The United States including Alaska is 3.6 million square miles.) Compared with the huge Arab expanse, the original Palestine Mandate was about one percent. The reduced “notch” after the Transjordan exclusion was about 23/100 of one percent. But in the War of Independence 1948–49 that fragment of the Palestine Mandate was temporarily still further shrunk by Transjordan’s Arab Legion—British financed, trained and led, equipped with tanks—which overran thin, ill-armed Jewish defenses and occupied historic Judea and Samaria, as well as east Jerusalem, thus pinching Israel’s central section to a razor-thin coastal strip sometimes less than 10 miles wide. The Armistice Commission at Rhodes in 1949 (Dr. Ralph Bunche, the U.N. mediator) marked these new lines on a map with a green felt pen (showing Judea and Samaria as the “west bank” part of Transjordan, and Gaza as part of Egypt); Israel’s “green line” area became 7,990 square miles—smaller than White Pine County, Nevada (population 8,000). It is this 1949 “green line” area which is the apparent goal of the present territorial negotiations.
22. After the “green line” of 1949 moved Transjordan’s western border across the river to include Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem, Abdullah did not revert to his earlier preferred name, “Palestine,” but instead chose “Jordan,” since his enlarged Hashemite kingdom now straddled the river. However, Arab factions outside present Jordan invoke the original Mandate, and consider Jordan part of “Palestine.” Article 2 of the PLO Covenant states, “Palestine with its boundaries that existed at the time of the British Mandate is an indivisible territorial unit.” While still based in Jordan, Arafat stated that the PLO was fighting Israel in the name of pan-Arabism, and added “What you call Transjordan is actually Palestine.” Paul S. Reibenfeld, “The Integrity of Palestine,” *Midstream*, August-September 1975, p. 11.
23. Bentwich, op. cit., p. 72

24. Gilbert, *Companion Volume IV*, pp. 1418–1419.
25. Gilbert, “Churchill and Zionism,” lecture, op. cit., pp. 10–11.
26. Gilbert, *Stricken World*, op. cit., pp. 513–514.
27. Gilbert, *Companion Volume IV*, p. 1420.
28. Cecil Roth, *A Short History of the Jewish People* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1936), p. 413.
29. Gilbert, *Stricken World*, op. cit., p. 583. In 1936 Amin went on to organize a countrywide Arab revolt against England’s administration, with hundreds of Jews his terror victims, for which the British deposed him from the Supreme Moslem Council; he escaped to Lebanon, and early in World War II plotted Rashid Ali’s pro-German coup in Iraq. Then in Rome he conferred with Mussolini, and in Berlin was given headquarters by the Nazis—the *Buero des Grossmufti*—where he coordinated propaganda, espionage and military recruitment, became Hitler’s mouthpiece to the Arab peoples, organized the liquidation of Jews in the Moslem areas of Bosnia, collaborated with the Ustashi regime in Croatia, and advised Himmler and Eichmann on speeding up the Final Solution—annihilation of the Jews. In 1946 he escaped to Egypt and set up a “Palestine Government” in Gaza, which transferred to Cairo.
30. Ismar Elbogen, tr. from the German by Moses Hadas, *A Century of Jewish Life* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1960), p. 597.
31. Bentwich, op. cit., p. 82.
32. Roth, loc. cit.
33. Gilbert, op. cit., p. 592. As for Mesopotamia, on August 23, 1921 Feisal was crowned king of Iraq, and in 1932 upon the country’s admission to the League of Nations that Mandate ended.
34. Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error, Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 173.
35. Op. cit., pp. 110–111.
36. Blanche E. C. Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1937), p. 163.
37. Op. cit., p. 165. (Cf. Weizmann, op. cit., pp. 152–4.)
38. At the White House he was introduced to Justice Brandeis, and the two discussed Palestine. Jacob De Haas, *Louis D. Brandeis, a Biographical Sketch* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1929), p. 90, in chapter “Stations to the Balfour Declaration.” The volume includes addresses by Brandeis 1912–1924.
39. Arabs later claimed that Palestine was part of the territory in which the British pledged their independence, but Palestine was not mentioned in the McMahon-Hussein correspondence. McMahon himself stated unequivocally in 1937 that Palestine was outside its scope, and this was fully understood at the time by Hussein. Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, editors, *The New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), column 1261.
40. Norman Rose, *Chaim Weizmann, a Biography* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1986), p. 145. See also Weizmann, op. cit., p. 152.
41. Weizmann, op. cit., p. 202.
42. Dugdale, op. cit., p. 170–1.
43. Ibid., p. 171.
44. Gilbert, op. cit., p. 583.
45. Ibid., pp. 586–7.
46. Ibid., pp. 594–8. To conciliate skeptics Churchill added that Abdullah was “a very agreeable, intelligent and civilized Arab prince” who, thanks to his emirate and subsidy, was maintaining order in Transjordan and restraining his subjects from both anti-French and anti-British activity. Abdullah ruled another thirty years before being assassinated in 1951 by an Arab outside the al-Aqsa mosque. His son Talal was deposed as mentally incompetent, and his grandson Hussein became and remains king.
47. Ibid., p. 621. Balfour here appeared to express a firmer opinion than earlier, when he had written in a letter, “I do not think we should go further than the original declaration which I sent to Lord Rothschild.”



48. Ibid., pp. 628–631.

49. Ibid., p. 637. Churchill repeatedly urged firmer action by Samuel.

50. It is not surprising that neither Samuel nor Churchill boldly stressed that logic, but it is strange that it was not firmly insisted on by Zionists either. Howard M. Sachar observes of the Transjordan severance, "This major concession to the Arabs evidently registered only slowly on the Zionists. In their earlier correspondence with the British they had expressed at most a perfunctory interest in the Transjordanian area; their colonies were all to the west. Only afterward, when the mandate officially excluded the Jewish National Home east of the Jordan, did recognition of the lost bargaining point fully dawn on the Zionist leadership." *A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), p. 127.

51. Weizmann, op. cit., p. 290.

52. Balfour, *Speeches on Zionism*, op. cit., pp. 40–65.

53. Gilbert, op. cit., 649–650. This is in chapter 36, "Defending the Balfour Declaration."

54. Ibid., 653. Churchill was quoting one Sir John Butcher.

55. Ibid., 652–9.

56. The July 1922 ratification confirmed the April 1920 San Remo agreement of the Principal Allied Powers that Britain was responsible for the Palestine Mandate and for implementing the Balfour Declaration. But in 1923 a second serious reduction in the Mandate's area was made, this time in a vitally important region: the Golan Heights plateau, approximately 10 by 40 miles, which had been included in the original Palestine Mandate, was quietly transferred to France's Syrian Mandate under a Franco-British boundary agreement. See map. (Also Deuteronomy chapter 4, verse 43.)

57. Balfour, op. cit., pp. 66–73.

58. Blanche Dugdale reported, "When Balfour rose to speak it seemed as if the cheering of the multitude would never cease." Balfour's address is on pp. 74–91 of *Speeches*, op. cit.

59. A vivid contemporary account of the August 1929 pogrom was by the young American writer Edward Robbin, then living in Jerusalem near Mea Shearim. "In the Wake of the Attacks," *The Menorah Journal*, issues for December 1929 and January 1930.

60. Edwin Samuel, *A Lifetime in Jerusalem* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1970), p. 103.

61. Henry Hurwitz, "The Future in Palestine," *The Menorah Journal*, October 1929. My father (1886–1961) was the editor of that periodical from its first issue in January 1915 until his death.

62. Samuel, *ibid.*, p. 109.

63. The British foreign correspondent and editor Henry Noel Brailsford wrote in 1929 of the postwar fading of determination to uphold the goal of a Jewish National Home. "It wanted great faith, an iron will, and a passion for construction to achieve this task. We sent no men of that caliber. . . . Slips of the Administration . . . and the general lack of enthusiasm among some of the officials have tempted the Arabs to believe that they can break down our none too ardent resolve to establish the National Home. . . ." "Great Britain and the Palestinian Mandate," *The Menorah Journal*, December 1929, pp. 216–7.

64. Stephen S. Wise and Jacob De Haas, *The Great Betrayal* (New York: Brentano's Publishers, 1930). They traced "step by step, the march from the high promise of November 2, 1917 to the base breach of October 20, 1930," and bitterly condemned "the wisdom and justness of rewarding the Arab massacres of August 1929 by the unconditional Passfield surrender of October 1930." Rabbi Wise was a founder and the first secretary of the Federation of American Zionists, which became the Zionist Organization of America. An intermediary to President Wilson and Colonel House, he helped gain Washington approval for the Balfour Declaration. He was a founder also of the American Jewish Congress, and during 1925–29 served his first term as its president.

65. Subsequently the nephew and heir of Lord Balfour gave the ancestral home in East Lothian, Whittingehame House, to a committee headed by a cousin of Norman Bentwich, for an agricultural training center where Jewish refugee children saved from Germany and central Europe could embark on a new and fruitful life. Bentwich tells of a visit there in 1941 (op. cit. 177–8) to see 200 of these rescued boys and girls "learning agriculture, horticulture and forestry" in preparation for their settlement in Palestine.

66. English army captain Orde Wingate, Bible student and Zionist enthusiast, organized and trained crack "Special Night Squadrons" of determined young *chalutzim* from the agricultural settlements to counter Arab raids, showing that given half a chance Jews were more than a match for Arab terrorists.

67. Weizmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 394–5.

68. The colonial secretary in Commons November 24, 1938, argued that because of their preeminence in education and technology the Jews would manage just fine in this chicken coop, and went on to recount in pious tones, "I cannot remember a time when I was not told stories about Nazareth and Galilee [both outside the coop] where was born the Prince of Peace." At this Churchill was heard to rumble, "I always thought he was born in Birmingham"—a jab at Chamberlain, who was born there in 1869. Sachar, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

69. Martin Gilbert's volume 5, *The Prophet of Truth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977) is the primary conveniently accessible source for the prewar period of Churchill's career and times; the second and third companion volumes provide the relevant documentation for the years 1929–39. (In his condensed one-volume biography see chapters 24–26.) Another standard work illuminating his lonely role sounding the tocsin in an era dominated by misguided optimism and disregard of Nazi propaganda and acts is William Manchester's biography of Churchill, *The Last Lion*—his vol. 2, *Alone 1932–1940* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1988). Not to lessen blame for the catastrophic damage wrought by appeasers in England (as well as here till Pearl Harbor), certain aspects of Churchill's personality and style may have limited the effectiveness of his grim warnings. For one view of these impediments see Robert R. James, *Churchill, a Study in Failure, 1900–1939* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1970), chapter 6, especially pp. 307–310.

70. Gilbert, *Churchill, a Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 542, 544.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 584, 592.

72. Iain Macleod, *Neville Chamberlain* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1961), p. 256.

73. Gilbert, *Churchill, a Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 598–600, and Czarnomski, *op. cit.*, pp. 152–4.

74. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 604.

75. Gilbert, vol. 5, *The Prophet of Truth*, *op. cit.*, p. 1070. Archibald Sinclair, now Liberal party leader, said in the debate, "When I think of the Arab people I want to help, I don't think of those powerful feudal families, of the Mufti and Nashashibis. I think of the fellahin living . . . on the land, and living there more prosperously, as the Royal Peel Commission reported to us, than they were before the Jews came to establish their National Home. . . . I think of the fellahin, of those people who are working in industry and improving their position, of the villages terrorized by the Mufti and working where they can in close cooperation with the Jews. . . ."

76. Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion, the Burning Ground, 1886–1948* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 717–8.

77. Robert Rhodes James, editor, *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches 1897–1963* (New York and London: Chelsea House Publishers, R. R. Bowker Co., 1974), Vol. VI: 1935–42, pp. 6220–3.

78. Gilbert, *Churchill, a Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

# *The Eighth and Thirteenth*

A L I C I A   O S T R I K E R

The Eighth of Shostakovich,  
Music about the worst  
Horror history offers,  
They played on public radio  
Again last night. In solitude  
I sipped my wine, I drank  
That somber symphony  
To the vile lees. The composer  
Draws out the minor thirds, the brass  
Tumbles overhead like virgin logs  
Felled from their forest, washing downriver,  
And the rivermen at song. Like ravens  
Who know when meat is in the offing,  
Oboes form a ring. An avalanche  
Of iron violins. At Leningrad  
During the years of siege  
Between bombardment, hunger  
And three sub-freezing winters,  
Three million dead were born  
Out of Christ's bloody side. Like icy  
Fetuses. For months  
One could not bury them, the earth  
And they alike were adamant.  
You stacked the dead like sticks until May's mud,  
When, of course, there was pestilence.  
But the music continues. It has no other choice.  
Stalin hated the music and forbade it.  
Not patriotic, not Russian, not Soviet.  
But the music continues. It has no other choice.  
Peer in as far as you like, it stays  
Exactly as bleak as now. The composer

---

ALICIA OSTRIKER is a poet and critic. Her most recent book is *The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Visions and Revisions* (Rutgers University Press, 1994). This poem was a prize winning entry in the Anna Davidson Rosenberg Poetry contest for Poems on the Jewish Experience held at the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley, California.

Opens his notebook. *Tyrants like to present themselves as patrons of the arts. That's a well-known fact. But tyrants understand nothing about art. Why? Because tyranny is a perversion and a tyrant is a pervert. He is attracted by the chance to crush people, to mock them, stepping over corpses. . . . And so, having satisfied his perverted desires, the man becomes a leader, and now the perversions continue because power has to be defended against madmen like yourself. For even if there are no such enemies, you have to invent them, you can't oppress the people completely, making the blood spurt. And without that, what pleasure is there in power? Very little.* The composer

Looks out the door of his dacha, it's April,  
 He watches farm children at play,  
 He forgets nothing. For the thirteenth—  
 I slip its cassette into my car  
 Radio—they made Kiev's Jews undress  
 After a march to the suburb,  
 Shot the hesitant quickly,  
 Battered some of the lame,  
 And screamed at everyone.  
 Valises were taken, would  
 Not be needed, packed  
 So abruptly, tied with such  
 Frayed rope. Soldiers next  
 Killed a few more. The living ones,  
 Penises of the men like string,  
 Breasts of the women bobbling  
 As at athletics, were told to run  
 Through a copse, to where  
 Wet with saliva  
 The ravine opened her mouth.  
 Marksmen shot the remainder  
 Then, there, by the tens of thousands,  
 Cleverly, so that bodies toppled  
 In without lugging. An officer  
 Strode upon the dead,  
 Shot what stirred.  
 How it would feel, such uneasy  
 Footing, even wearing boots  
 That caressed one's calves, leather  
 And lambswool, the soles thick rubber,

Such the music's patient inquiry.  
What then is the essence of reality?  
Of the good? The mind's fuse sputters,  
The heart aborts, it smells like wet ashes,  
The hands lift to cover their eyes,  
Only the music continues. We'll try,  
For the first movement,  
A full chorus.  
The immediate reverse of Beethoven.  
An axe between the shoulder blades  
Of Herr Wagner. *People knew about Babi Yar  
before Yevtoshenko's poem, but they were silent. And when  
they read the poem, the silence was broken. Art destroys  
silence. I know that many will not agree with me and will  
point out other, more noble aims of art. They'll talk about  
beauty, grace and other high qualities. But you won't catch  
me with that bait. I'm like Sobakevich in Dead Souls: you can  
sugar-coat a toad, and I still won't put it in my mouth.*

*Most of my symphonies are tombstones,* said Shostakovich.

*All poets are Jews,* said Tsvetaeva.

The words *never again*  
Clashing against the words  
*Again and again*  
—That music.

# From *In the Garden of Delights*

ARIEL BLOCH AND CHANA BLOCH

THE SONG OF SONGS IS A POEM ABOUT THE SEXUAL awakening of a young woman and her lover. In a series of subtly articulated scenes, the two meet in an idealized landscape of fertility and abundance—a kind of Eden—where they discover the pleasures of love. The passage from innocence to experience is a subject of the Eden story, too, but there the loss of innocence is fraught with consequences. The Song looks at the same border-crossing and sees only the joy of discovery.

The poem is set in early spring, with its intimations of ripening. The rains of the winter season have just ended, the vines are in blossom, the air is alive with scents and birdsong. Since the poem speaks through metaphor, this setting reveals something essential about the lovers, who live in harmony with the natural world. The images of spring reflect their youth, and the innocent freshness of their passion.

The woman appears to be very young, perhaps just past puberty. Her brothers call her their “little sister” and think of her as a child—“We have a little sister / and she has no breasts,” they say—though she is more grown-up than they admit: since by her own account her breasts are developed, she has reached sexual maturity (8:8–10).<sup>1</sup> The Shulamite, as she is called, is presented in relation to her close family, her mother and her brothers, as well as a group of young women, the daughters of Jerusalem. She and her lover meet secretly in the countryside at night and part at daybreak, so it is clear that they are not married.

For centuries, exegetes have considered their relationship chaste, ignoring the plain sense of the Hebrew. The word *dodim*, which occurs six times in the Song, including the opening verse—“Your *dodim* are better than wine”—is almost always translated as “love,” though it refers specifically to sexual love.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the metaphors of feasting suggest fulfillment,

---

ARIEL BLOCH is Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California at Berkeley. An expert on Semitic linguistics, he has published books and articles on classical and modern Arabic, biblical and modern Hebrew, Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Aramaic.

CHANA BLOCH is a poet, translator, scholar, and literary critic. She has published two books of poems, *The Secrets of the Tribe* and *The Past Keeps Changing*, translations of *Dahlia Ravikovitch* and *Yehuda Amichai*, and a critical study of George Herbert. She is Professor of English and Director of the Creative Writing Program at Mills College.

*These selections are taken from Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch's The Song of Songs: A New Translation, With an Introduction and Commentary, and an Afterword by Robert Alter, which is forthcoming from Random House in April 1995.*



particularly when they are in the perfect tense, and the verb “to come into” or “to enter” often has a patently sexual meaning in biblical Hebrew:

I have come into my garden, . . .  
 I have gathered my myrrh and my spices,  
 I have eaten from the honeycomb,  
 I have drunk the milk and the wine. (5:1)

All this strengthens our conviction that the sexual relationship between the two lovers is not just yearned for—as has often been assumed—but actually consummated. In this respect, our understanding of the Song differs crucially from that of most commentators in the past, and indeed some even in our own day.

How can a poem so voluptuous be so full of innocent delight? For one thing, since it relies on metaphor rather than explicit statement, the language of the Song is restrained and delicate even where it is most sensuous. And because the lovers seem new to love, tender and proud and full of discovery, their words have a kind of purity—a “cleanly wantonness,” in the phrase of the seventeenth-century English poet Robert Herrick.

In the Bible, written for the most part from a male point of view, women are by definition the second sex. History is traced through the line of the fathers, as in the priestly genealogies (“And Enoch begat Methuselah”), and the typical formulas for sexual relations (“he knew her,” “he came in unto her,” “he lay with her”) make the woman seem passive and acted upon. But in the Song, where the lovers take turns inviting one another, desire is entirely reciprocal. Both are described in images that suggest tenderness (lilies, doves, gazelles) as well as strength and stateliness (pillars, towers). In this book of the Bible, the woman is certainly the equal of the man.

Indeed, she often seems more than his equal. Most of the lines are hers, including the first word in the poem—“Kiss me”—and the last. As a rule, she is the more forceful of the two; her lover describes her as *’ayummah*, “daunting” (6:4, 10). Only the Shulamite makes dramatic statements about herself: “I am dark, and I am beautiful!” (1:5), “I am a wall / and my breasts are towers” (8:10), and only she commands the elements: “Awake, north wind! O south wind, come, / breathe upon my garden” (4:16). She isn’t shy about pursuing her lover: she goes out into the streets of Jerusalem at night to search for him—bold and unusual behavior for an unmarried woman (3:1–4, 5:6–7). She finds him, and makes it perfectly clear that she intends to keep him: “I held him, I would not let him go / until I brought him to my mother’s house” (3:5).

Her invitations to love are more outspoken than his: “Let my lover come into his garden” (4:16); “There I will give you my love” (7:13); “I would give you . . . / my pomegranate wine” (8:2). She is the one who takes

the initiative in their lovemaking: “I awakened you,” she reminds him with some pride (8:5). In 6:11–12 he goes down to the walnut grove in an expectant mood (“to see if the vine had budded”), and there, to his surprise, she anticipates and rewards him. When she asks him to be true to her forever—“Bind me as a seal upon your heart” (8:6)—she phrases the wish in her own characteristically emphatic way.

It is the Shulamite who pronounces the great truths about love:

For love is as fierce as death,  
its jealousy bitter as the grave.  
Even its sparks are a raging fire,  
a devouring flame. (8:6)

And she is the one who teaches that love must not be roused carelessly:

Daughters of Jerusalem, swear to me  
by the gazelles, by the deer in the field,  
that you will never awaken love  
until it is ripe. (2:7, 3:5, 8:4)

The wisdom here may sound like Ecclesiastes (“Everything under the heavens has its time and its season: . . . a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing,” 3:1, 5) but the spirit that informs it is very different: not a bleak determinism but the inner logic of the passions. And the voice is her own—urgent, insistent, filled with awe at love’s power.

The Shulamite’s lively presence has been obscured by two millennia of translations and interpretations that, for the sake of propriety, have presented her as a sweet young thing, chaste and demure and properly bridal. In most translations (the King James Version is a notable exception), she wears a veil, a reading not supported by the Hebrew. That incongruous veil, like the fig leaf of Renaissance painting and sculpture, is a sign of the discomfort of the exegetes. When we lift the veil from her face, the Shulamite is revealed as a passionate young woman, as spirited and assertive as Juliet.

Apart from the Shulamite, women are given an unmistakable prominence in the Song. There is no mention of a father or a “father’s house,” the usual biblical term for “family,” while mothers are referred to repeatedly. The Shulamite is her mother’s favorite (6:9); when she speaks of her brothers, she calls them, in the Hebrew, “my mother’s sons” (1:6); she wishes her lover were as close to her as a brother “who nursed at [her] mother’s breast” (8:1). She brings her lover home to her “mother’s house,” perhaps to signify a more binding relationship (3:4, 8:2). She declares that she awakened her lover in the very place where his mother conceived and gave birth to him (8:5). Even King Solomon’s mother appears in the poem, crowning her son on his wedding day (3:11). Though the history of the tribe

is shaped by the fathers, the traditions of love, in the Song at least, are handed down by the mothers.

The daughters of Jerusalem act as a kind of chorus, a foil to the Shulamite, and an audience. She addresses her feelings about love and her lover to them, and turns to them for help; they are invoked, and perhaps even present, during some of the couple's intimate dialogues. Like the young women who accompany Jephthah's daughter in her mourning, or the women of Bethlehem who come out to greet Naomi, the daughters of Jerusalem represent the social milieu in which the lovers move, answering their need for public testimony and public validation. The young man's companions, mentioned briefly in 1:7 (and perhaps 5: 1 and 8:13), may serve a similar purpose, though unlike the daughters of Jerusalem they are given no voice in the poem. The lovers in the Song are certainly unlike the many star-crossed couples of other literary traditions who languish in tragic isolation.

The brothers and the watchmen provide whatever friction there is in the poem. From the beginning, the Shulamite's brothers are watching her; as one would expect in a biblical text, they are their sister's keepers. In 1:6 we learn that they have rebuked her, possibly for her sexual behavior—that is, if “guarding the vineyard” is understood metaphorically. The enigmatic “Catch us the foxes” (2:15), which has been assigned to a variety of speakers, belongs most plausibly to the brothers; in their proprietary way, they are worrying about the young “foxes” who may be despoiling “their” vines (the vineyard is associated with the Shulamite throughout the poem). Later they consider how to deal with their little sister when she is old enough for suitors (8:8–9). We are not surprised that the Shulamite has the last word in these deliberations (8:10).

When the watchmen first come upon the Shulamite in the streets of Jerusalem at night, they seem harmless enough, but later they assault her physically (3:3, 5:7). Whether or not this incident reflects reality, its primary purpose in the poem is to create dramatic tension. By their opposition, the brothers and the watchmen provoke the Shulamite to reveal her resolve and assurance in love. And their presence serves as a contrast to the sweet flowing milk and honey and myrrh, which to some readers might otherwise seem cloying.

Despite the brothers and watchmen, the Song has none of the dark complication of many familiar love stories. For Romeo and Juliet, love is wedded to loss and death; for Tristan and Isolde, or for Heathcliff and Catherine, love itself is a form of suffering. The word “passion” comes from the Latin *patior*, “to suffer,” and passionate love is often regarded as a consuming disease, its symptoms being (in Sappho's diagnosis) a fluttering heartbeat, a burning sensation, a drumming in the ears, a cold sweat,

paleness, and trembling. But apart from one episode of rapid heartbeat (5:4), the lovers in the Song exhibit few of the usual symptoms. They don't suffer love, they savor it.

The Song has its moments of anxiety or yearning, to be sure, but the prevailing mood is one of celebration. Hopelessness is not among its charms. The young, in each other's arms, sing a sensual music, their theme the transforming experience of falling in love. Like the blossoming wildflowers, they take no thought for the morrow. Sufficient unto the day is its own delight.

The lovers are fervent, impetuous, filled with an unwavering headlong intensity. "Take me by the hand, let us run together!" in 1:4 proclaims their exuberance. Hyperbole is their natural language. Dramatic and self-dramatizing, the Shulamite sings out:

Let me lie among vine blossoms,  
in a bed of apricots!  
I am in the fever of love. (2:5)

And her lover matches her extravagance:

O come with me, my bride,  
come down with me from Lebanon . . .  
from the mountains of the leopards,  
the lions' dens. (4:8)

A moment later, they are tender and playful with each other; they vie in the gallantries of praise; she interrupts him lovingly to complete his thought. He in particular is fond of affectionate epithets: "my love," "my friend," "my sister, my bride," "my dove," "my perfect one." Both of them delight in the sound of the first person plural: "our bed," "our roofbeams," "our rafters," they say, "our wall," "our land," "our doors," taking possession, as a couple, of the world around them.

Shakespeare was right about lovers: they have such seething brains, such fantasies. To be in love is to be caught up in the power of fantasy. "Be like a gazelle," the Shulamite commands (2:17), as if the words themselves had the power to transform reality. In her mind her lover can as easily become a king. When she calls him "the king," or when he calls her "nobleman's daughter," they are dressing up in borrowed robes, playing at King Solomon-and-his-court. And though they seem, at least from this distance, convincingly pastoral, it may be that they are only playing at being shepherds; apart from 1:7-8, the images of pasturing (2:16, 6:2-3), like those of the vineyard, are erotic double entendres. Perhaps, like Marlowe's *Passionate Shepherd*, or Shakespeare's *Rosalind*, they are really just lovers in shepherds' clothing.

Jerusalem is at the center of their world (“Shulamite” probably means “woman of Jerusalem”), but the geography of their imagination reaches from the mountains of Lebanon to the oasis of Ein Gedi, from Heshbon in the east to Mount Carmel on the sea—the four points of their compass. The garden of delights in the Song is a fantasy garden, filled with precious and exotic spices:

flowering henna and spikenard,  
spikenard and saffron, cane and cinnamon,  
with every tree of frankincense,  
myrrh and aloes,  
all the rare spices. (4:13–14)

Henna and saffron grew in ancient Israel, but myrrh, cinnamon, and cane probably did not, while frankincense, aloes, and spikenard were imported from faraway Arabia, India, Nepal, and China.<sup>3</sup> With what abandon these lovers inhabit their fantasies! But that is precisely what makes them seem so convincing. The Song of Songs offers us an imaginary garden—with real lovers in it. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

For a book of only eight chapters, the song has elicited a prodigious volume of commentary. There is hardly a line of the Song that does not present some difficulty, and no other book of the Bible has called forth such wildly divergent interpretations.<sup>4</sup> The difficulties arise in part from the compactness and concentration of the poetic form. While the narrative prose of the Bible is fairly straightforward and accessible, biblical poetry is compressed and elliptical, sometimes to the point of unintelligibility. The language, too, is very often obscure. The Song has an unusually high proportion of *hapax legomena* (words occurring only once), as well as rare words and constructions. A hapax is almost as frustrating for the interpreter as a lacuna: even where the context provides some clues, it is difficult to establish the precise meaning of such a word. Verses like “King Solomon built an ‘*appiryon*’” (3:9) or “your *śelahim* are an orchard” (4:13) or “a king is caught in the *rehaṭim*” (7:6) must finally remain a riddle.

Actually, the Song itself is a kind of hapax, for it is the only example of secular love poetry from ancient Israel that has survived. Other love poems must have been composed in biblical times, including poems about courtship, marriage, or unrequited love, but if they were written down at all, they have since vanished. There is something to be learned by comparing the Song with poems from ancient Egypt or Hellenistic Greece, but because it is one of a kind, the Song is in many respects an enigma.

Early audiences would have had no trouble understanding the Song in its literal sense; even in rabbinic times there were those who still

understood it in this way. Rabbi Akiva (d. 135 C.E.) warned, “Whoever warbles the Song of Songs at banqueting houses, treating it like an ordinary song, has no portion in the World to Come,”<sup>5</sup> the emphatic prohibition making it perfectly clear just what people were doing, and where. Rabbi Simeon ben Gamaliel (late first century C.E.) recounted that twice a year, on the fifteenth of Av and the Day of Atonement, the young women of Jerusalem would dress in white and go out to dance in the vineyards, calling out to prospective husbands, “Young man, lift up your eyes and see what you would choose for yourself,” and reciting verses from the Book of Proverbs and the Song of Songs.<sup>6</sup> These rabbinic passages are the earliest testimony we have about the popular understanding of the Song. For the young men in the tavern, or the young women in the vineyard, the Song needed no interpretation, whatever the theologians were saying.

But the theologians prevailed: for twenty centuries, the Song was almost universally read as a religious or historical allegory. The allegorical interpretation found its first great champion in Rabbi Akiva, who taught that the Song was about the love of God and the people of Israel, an interpretation elaborated in various ways by Jewish commentators such as Rashi (d. 1105) and Ibn Ezra (d. 1168). The Church Fathers, following Origen (d. 254), applied this reading to the relations between Christ and his Bride the Church, or Christ and the soul of the believer. For the rabbis and Church Fathers the “spiritual” meaning is inherent in the text; to read it as “carnal” is to miss its deeper truth. They found support in the Old Testament metaphor of God’s marriage to Israel and the New Testament image of Christ as a Bridegroom<sup>7</sup>—though nothing in the Song itself calls for such an interpretation.

The rabbis and the Church Fathers were committed to an allegorical interpretation, moreover, because in their world the very fact of sexuality had become problematic. The rabbis associated the *yeṣer ha-raʿ* (“evil impulse”) primarily with sexuality; on the other hand, they never saw celibacy as an ideal, but instead advocated marriage and “the sober duty of procreation.”<sup>8</sup> The Church Fathers were rather more extreme: Origen took Christ literally—not allegorically, alas!—and made himself a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven’s sake; Jerome (d. 420) believed that a man who too ardently desires his own wife is an adulterer; Augustine (d. 430) wistfully imagined procreation in Eden, when the body obeyed the will without the vexation of lust. These men genuinely believed that in reading the text allegorically they were serving a higher purpose. They sought to spiritualize the Song, to purge its mortal grossness, the way some Greek philosophers interpreted away the carnality of the Homeric gods, or Philo converted the legends of Genesis into a series of philosophical and moral truths. This kind of exegesis requires considerable ingenuity and linguistic acrobatics, and some of its more extravagant “findings” now seem very curious: the



Shulamite's two breasts as Moses and Aaron, or the Old and New Testaments; her navel as the Great Sanhedrin or the order of holy preachers.

Allegories that reconstructed the intimate passion of the lovers as political or religious history now seem particularly misconceived. The Targum, a seventh-century paraphrase in Aramaic, saw in the Song an account of God's relations with Israel from the Exodus till the coming of the Messiah. Luther read it as Solomon's thanksgiving to God for his divinely ordained and peaceful kingdom; one twentieth-century exegete read it as an Essene manifesto, with the Pharisees playing the role of watchmen. And as recently as 1992 a Jesuit theologian wrote a commentary arguing that the Song is "a text in code" about "the restoration of the Davidic monarchy in Judah after the exile." A major discovery of his is a "hitherto unsuspected" meaning of the word "love." Commentators have invariably understood this word to refer to the affection between the lovers, a reading he finds "reductionist" and "sentimental." On the basis of his study of the treaty literature of the ancient Near East, he concludes that "love" is a technical term for the sociopolitical alliance between the house of David and the Jewish community.<sup>9</sup> One cannot help thinking of those learned, old, respectable scholars in Yeats's poem who "shuffle" and "cough in ink" as they annotate the lines of the young Catullus.

In the abundance and generosity of the Song, a lily is a lily is a woman's body is a man's lips is a field of desire. The allegorists, intent on delivering a spiritual equivalent for every last physical detail, read the Song as if they were decoding a cryptogram. From their perspective, of course, they were not imposing an arbitrary reading but searching out the hidden soul of the text. The allegorical interpretation now seems to us constrained and often absurd, but it may well have played a vital role in safeguarding the text. When we remember how many great works of antiquity have been lost—the poems of Sappho, for example, have come down to us only in fragments—we must be grateful for the protective wrap of allegory, if indeed it helped to preserve the Song intact.

The Song fared better at the hands of the mystics, Jewish and Christian, who honored its literal meaning as symbolic of the human longing for union with God. The *Zohar* (a mystical commentary on the Pentateuch written in the late thirteenth century) speculated about intercourse between the male and female aspects of God, believing it could actually be influenced by the way in which human sexual relations were conducted; for this exalted purpose, the Cabbalists were encouraged to have intercourse with their wives on Sabbath eve.<sup>10</sup> Christian mystics like Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth century, or St. Teresa of Avila and the poet St. John of the Cross in the sixteenth, contemplating the love of God and the soul, found in the Song a source and inspiration for their ecstatic spirituality. St. Bernard, who wrote

eighty-six sermons on the first two chapters of the Song, set the tone: "O strong and burning love, O love urgent and impetuous, which does not allow me to think of anything but you. . . . You laugh at all considerations of fitness, reason, modesty and prudence, and tread them underfoot."<sup>11</sup> The mystics read the Song allegorically, to be sure, but they remained true to its intensity and passion, its emotional power.

All along, there were those who favored a literal interpretation, though they had to pay dearly for their views. Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia (d. 429), who read the Song as a poem by Solomon in defense of his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, was condemned in his own day, and again after his death by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553—sufficient deterrent for any commentator with like inclinations. Among the Protestant Reformers, the humanist and Bible translator Sebastian Castellio considered the Song a "lascivious and obscene poem in which Solomon described his indecent amours";<sup>12</sup> Castellio thought it had no spiritual value and should be excluded from the canon. For this and other offenses, he was forced to leave Geneva.

As the allegorical approach lost ground at the end of the eighteenth century, Protestant exegetes began to expound the literal sense, while attempting in one way or another to defend the Song against charges of indecency. In the Victorian era, some commentators who supported the popular "dramatic theory" spun out of the poem a scenario with three principal characters: King Solomon, a beautiful country maiden, and her shepherd-lover. The King carries the maiden off to Jerusalem, and tries to convince her to exchange her humble station for a life at court, but the Shulamite, a paragon of virtue and devotion, steadfastly resists his blandishments and remains true to her rustic swain. This soap opera is embellished with a complicated plot line and a moral purpose, neither of which has any foundation in the text. One famous scholar of Semitics, the author of an influential introduction to the Old Testament, defended this interpretation—"the triumph of plighted love over the seductions of worldly magnificence"—as having "real ethical value," lending the Song "a purpose and an aim," thereby saving it from the reproach of being "purely sensuous."<sup>13</sup> So much for Victorian sermonizing. But even in our day there are exegetes who take an apologetic stance. Although the Song is no longer seen as the "erotic effluvia of the unchaste Oriental mind which calls a spade a spade,"<sup>14</sup> there are still commentators who prefer to think of the lovers as a married couple, or who declare their love unconsummated.

A new theory was advanced at the turn of the century, based on research by the Prussian consul in Damascus, who saw the Song as a collection of poems like those sung at peasant weddings in Syria. In festivities lasting for seven days, the bride and bridegroom were crowned as king and queen, and their beauty proclaimed in formal songs of praise;

war songs were sung, and the bride performed a sword dance. But the “wedding-week theory” doesn’t really fit the details of the Song: though the young man is addressed as “king,” the woman is never called a “queen”; the dance in 7:1 is not a sword dance, and apart from 3:11, the poem has nothing to do with a wedding ceremony. Still, it is conceivable that popular customs such as those in Syria may have had their analogue in ancient Israel, and may shed light on the composition of some of the Song’s lyrics. And this theory at least recognized the love of ordinary mortals as the subject of the Song.

More recently, scholars have associated the Song with Near Eastern fertility rites celebrated with music and ecstatic poetry in Sumer from the third millennium BCE, and later adopted by the Akkadians, the Canaanites, and, some believe, the ancient Hebrews. Each spring the king and a priestess, representing Dumuzi and Inanna (Tammuz and Ishtar), would participate in this “sacred marriage rite” for the purpose of restoring life to nature.<sup>15</sup> Some of the images and motifs in the ancient Mesopotamian poems, detached from their original ritual context, may indeed have left their traces on the Song; an example of such an image is “Your right hand you have placed on my vulva, / Your left stroked my head.”<sup>16</sup> But fertility, the central concern of the cultic rite, is of no concern in the Song. And since the prophets emphatically denounced the fertility rites of Israel’s neighbors, it is unlikely that the Song would have found its way into the canon if it had anything to do with the copulation of the gods; human kisses were problem enough for the rabbis.

The commentaries on the Song are, as Polonius might have said, the best in the world, whether literal, philosophical, ecclesiastical, allegorical-historical, comical-allegorical, or tragicomical-mystical-eschatological. They define the subject of the Song variously as the love of God and Israel, Christ and the Church, or Christ and the believer’s soul; the chaste love of the Virgin Mary; the marriage of Solomon and Pharaoh’s daughter or of the active and the passive intellect; the discourse of Solomon with Wisdom; the trials of the people of Israel; or the history of the Church—and that’s only a partial list. Commentators have praised the Song for teaching chastity, fidelity, and virtue, or denounced it as lewd and injurious to morals. Of course, every reading of the Song necessarily bears the imprint of the interpreter’s time, personal outlook, and taste. But whatever its ideological bias, this voluminous scholarship has advanced the understanding of the text, and no student of the Song can afford to ignore it.

In some respects, the Song seems very accessible to readers now, more so than it has been for some two thousand years. The Shulamite, with her veil off, is a figure all of us recognize, and we find the frankness about erotic love more natural than did earlier audiences. In our day it is the innocence

of the Song, its delicacy, that has the power to surprise. Perhaps that very innocence is one source of the poem's continuing attractiveness. To read the Song is to recover, through the power of art, a freshness of spirit that is now all but lost to us. The Eden story preserves a memory of wholeness and abundance from the beginning of time; the prophets look forward to a peaceable kingdom at the End of Days. The Song of Songs locates that kingdom in human love, in the habitable present, and for the space of our attention, allows us to enter it.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **From *About the Translation***

The Song of Songs is one of the most enigmatic books in the Bible. Line by line and word by word, it is far more obscure and problematic than a reader of English might suppose, in part because it contains a higher proportion of rare locutions than any other book of the Bible. A few examples, explained at greater length in the commentary, will suggest how we went about deciphering the text.

In resolving interpretive cruxes, our practice has been to look first to the internal evidence of the Song itself. Since the Song is consistent in its language and imagery, words or expressions or grammatical constructions in one chapter often help to interpret difficulties in another. For example, the notion of "spreading" implied in *reḥadato* (3:10) elucidates the rare verb *rappad*, which we understand as "to make or spread a bed" (2:4). Similarly, the notion of height implied in *dagul* "towering" (5:10) suggests a possible meaning for *nidgalot*, literally "the elevated ones" (6:4,10), which we interpret as "stars."

As a second step, we turned to other books of the Bible for help. A crucial instance is the word *dodim*, a comprehensive term for lovemaking, including kisses and caresses as well as intercourse. This meaning could not be determined on the basis of the Song alone. However, the word occurs three other times in the Bible, in each case referring to sexual love. In Proverbs 7:18 an adulterous woman invites a young man: "Come, let us drink our fill of *dodim* [*nirveh dodim*], let us make love all night long, for my husband is not at home." This sense of the word is found also in Ezekiel 16:7-8, "Your breasts were well-formed. . . . I saw that you had reached the age of lovemaking [*'et dodim*]," and 23:17, "They came to her into the bed of love [*miškab dodim*] and defiled her with their lust." Given these uses of *dodim*, we can be quite certain that the word also refers to sexual love in the Song—something a reader would not know from most translations, which render it simply as "love."

An example that has a significant bearing on our view of the Shulamite is the word *šammah*, which occurs three times in the Song (4:1,3; 6:7); this has been translated either as “hair” or “veil.” Some medieval Jewish commentators understood the word as “hair” (the King James Version, accordingly, has “locks”), but the reading “veil,” which appeared as early as the Septuagint, made its way into most modern versions. Again, the meaning of *šammah* cannot be established on the basis of its occurrences in the Song alone. But the word is found once more in the Bible, in a passage of Isaiah which proves to be decisive. There, in a series of sarcastic imperatives, the prophet tells the Virgin Daughter of Babylon that she will have to bare parts of her body in public, exposing herself to shame:

Take the millstones, and grind meal:  
 uncover thy locks [*galli šammatek*];  
 make bare the leg, uncover the thigh [*galli šoq*], . . .  
 Thy nakedness shall be uncovered,  
 yea, thy shame shall be seen.

(Isa. 47:2–3, King James Version)

In this passage, “thigh” and *šammah* are both governed by the same verb, *galli* (“lay bare,” not “remove”). *Galli šoq* means “lay bare [your] thigh” (obviously not “remove your thigh!”), and therefore *galli šammatek* can only mean “lay bare your *šammah*.” This verse in Isaiah clearly tilts the scales in favor of the meaning “hair” in the Song. One can understand why “veil” was adopted by translators in earlier centuries: a Shulamite who hides her seductive charms with a veil, as befits a chaste maiden of Israel, best served the apologetic approach to the Song—what may be called the “pious bias” in biblical exegesis.<sup>17</sup> It is surprising, however, that the Shulamite still remains veiled in most contemporary versions of the Song, which are not governed by that bias. But as so often in the history of translation, a misreading, once established, tends to be perpetuated in version after version.

Only after carefully weighing the internal biblical evidence did we consider that of the surrounding cultures. For example, the straightforward Hebrew meaning of *diglo ‘alay ‘ahabāh* in 2:4 is “his flag over me is love.” We consider this an exuberant expression of the Shulamite’s delight in the young man’s love. There is no need to resort to Akkadian *diglu* “glance, intent,” from *dagalu* “to look,” and to explain this as “his intent toward me is love,” as some scholars have done. It isn’t likely that biblical Hebrew would have borrowed such a basic verb as “to look,” for which it has its own words (*ra’ah*, *hibbit*). Finding a verbal root in a cognate language is not in itself a solution to a problem in the text; the field of Semitic

languages is filled with roots, not every one worth digging up. To our thinking, the traditional Jewish principle of exegesis from within the biblical corpus (*nidrešet torah mi-tok 'aşmah*) is often methodologically more sound than the hasty resort to extra-biblical sources.

Readers tend to associate interpretive difficulties primarily with obscure words, but much of the meaning of a text is encoded in the inflections of a language: the moods and tenses of verbs, prefixes and suffixes, definite or indefinite articles, prepositions, and plural forms. Mistranslations occur when their specific functions are overlooked or edited out in unjustified emendations. It is best to proceed from the assumption that every such nuance is motivated and meaningful. For example, the tense of the verbs in 5:1 is crucial to the sense of the passage: "I have come [*ba'ti*] into my garden, I have gathered [*'ariti*] my myrrh, I have eaten [*'akalti*], I have drunk [*šatiti*]." The perfect tense here implies a completed action. Translations that resort to a noncommittal present tense ("I come, I gather, I eat, I drink"), or an infinitive construction ("I have come . . . to eat"), downplay the sexual implications of the image, if not by design then at least in effect.

There is no reason to ignore or explain away the possessive suffix of *susati* in 1:9, as exegetes have done for centuries. Although a straight-forward reading of *susati* yields "my mare," the word has usually been translated with the indefinite article ("a mare"), and sometimes even as a collective noun ("my cavalry"). Neither reading is tenable on linguistic grounds. It may be that the erotic connotations of the image prompted the pious translators and exegetes to avoid the possessive suffix—or so at least it seems, since they certainly had no problem translating *yonati* in 2:14, which has the same syntax, as "my dove." Another reading that ought to be taken at face value is the plural *bateynu* ("our houses," 1:17); there is no need to "correct" it to "our house," as the King James and other versions have done. We read this as a metaphorical expression for the places in the countryside where the lovers meet to make love, and we translate, "Wherever we lie / Our bed is green." Similarly, *har'ini 'et mar'ayik* (literally "let me see your sights," 2:14) is usually rendered "let me see your face." We believe the plural form here is intended, and adds a nuance worth preserving: "Let me see all of you, from every side."

In a poetic translation, tone, rhythm, and sound are naturally of crucial importance. Since the Song was almost certainly intended to be recited or sung, we have paid particular attention to the music of the poem, which is rich with assonance and alliteration. . . .

Any modern translator of the Song must acknowledge the lofty achievement of the King James Version (1611). With its rich textures and



resounding cadences, that version's Song is magnificent English poetry, justly beloved by generations of readers. Nonetheless, significant advances in biblical scholarship during the past four centuries—not to speak of the past four decades—have shown many of its readings to be in error, including some of the best-known verses, such as “Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples” (2:5) or “terrible as an army with banners” (6:10). And its language is often dated, as in “I am sick of love” (2:5) or “My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him” (5:4).

Taken out of its accustomed liturgical context and read as a work of art, the Song becomes a new poem, just as a painting or statue in a church looks entirely different when displayed in a secular setting. The heightened diction of the King James Version, already somewhat archaic in the seventeenth century, was conceived for liturgical purposes, and would be inappropriate in a contemporary translation. One of the major challenges facing a translator today is to find the proper register in English, neither too formal and stylized nor too breezy and colloquial—language that is fresh and urgent and passionate, and at the same time dignified. Just as earlier interpretations typically erred on the side of prudishness, contemporary translations (perhaps to atone for centuries of exegetical evasiveness) sometimes verge on crudeness, as in a recent translation by a distinguished scholar: “Your vulva [is] a rounded crater; / May it never lack punch!” (7:3) This verse alone, with its three howlers, illustrates how important it is for a translator to be sensitive to levels of style. The word *šorerek* means “navel,” not “vulva”—and besides, the anatomical term “vulva” would be out of place in the delicately allusive language of the Song. There is a difference between sex and eros, as the poet of the Song is well aware. A translation of the Song ought to be informed by this distinction.

Translating an ancient text is in some ways analogous to the process of restoring a work of art that has been dulled by time. Not long ago, a team of conservators examined the frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, using infrared light to penetrate the surface, and then, with meticulous care, set about removing five centuries of grime, soot, smoke, and old varnish. The work of the conservators revealed unexpectedly brilliant colors, hues of turquoise and orange that seemed quite unlike Michelangelo—that is, unlike the Michelangelo of tradition, who was thought to favor a much darker palette. Readers of this translation will discover that the colors of the Song are brighter, its music more sensuous, than they may have anticipated from other versions. Those charms of the Song are not our invention; they belong to the pleasures of the Hebrew. Our aim has been to restore in English the passion and intensity of the original.

## NOTES

1. Cf. Ezek. 16:7-8: "Your breasts were well-formed. . . . I saw that you had reached the age of lovemaking" (*'et dodim*). See Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1-20*, vol. 22 of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 270, 276-77.

2. Song 1:2, 1:4, 4:10 (twice), 5:1, 7:13; compare Ezek. 16:8, 23:17, Prov. 7:18. References to the Bible are to the standard English translations; occasionally the numbering differs from the Hebrew by a verse or two.

3. Yehuda Feliks, *Song of Songs: Nature, Epic and Allegory* (Jerusalem: Israel Society for Biblical Research, 1983), pp. 22-26.

4. For a more detailed summary of the history of exegesis, see H. H. Rowley, "The Interpretation of the Song of Songs," in his *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 195-245; Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs*, vol. 7c of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 89-229; and Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 11-41.

5. Tosefta, Sanhedrin 12:10, as quoted in Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 249.

6. Mishnah, Ta'anith 4:8, as quoted in Fox, *Song of Songs*, p. 229.

7. Isa. 54:5; Jer. 2:2; Hosea 2:14-20; Matt. 9:15, 25:1-13; John 3:29.

8. David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), pp. 40, 43-44.

9. Luis Stadelmann, *Love and Politics: A New Commentary on the Song of Songs* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), pp. 2, 16, 23.

10. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941; 3d rev. ed., New York: Schocken Books, 1961), pp. 225-35; Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, pp. 109-13.

11. "Sermon 79," in *Bernard of Clairvaux: On the Song of Songs*, trans. Irene Edmonds, Cistercian Fathers Series, no. 40 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1980), p. 137.

12. According to Calvin's account, quoted in Roland H. Bainton, "The Bible in the Reformation," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 8-9.

13. S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (1913; reprint, Cleveland: Meridian, 1956), p. 445.

14. Max L. Margolis, "How the Song of Songs Entered the Canon," in *The Song of Songs: A Symposium*, ed. Wilfred H. Schoff (Philadelphia: Commercial Museum, 1924), p. 9. Margolis is characterizing the views of his contemporaries in 1924.

15. The clearest explanation may be found in Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 49-106.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 105. See also the Mesopotamian clay plaque of lovers embracing in a similar posture in Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), pp. 43, 187.

17. For another example of the "pious bias" in Bible exegesis, see Ariel Bloch, "Questioning God's Omnipotence in the Bible: A Linguistic Case Study," in *Semitic Studies in Honor of Wolf Leslau*, ed. Alan S. Kaye, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 174-88.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Translation, Text, and Commentary

- 1: 2 Kiss me, make me drunk with your kisses!  
Your sweet loving  
is better than wine.
- 3 You are fragrant,  
you are myrrh and aloes.  
All the young women want you.
- 4 Take me by the hand, let us run together!
- My lover, my king, has brought me into his chambers.  
We will laugh, you and I, and count  
each kiss,  
better than wine.
- Every one of them wants you.

יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ 1:2  
כִּי־טוֹבִים דְּדִידָךְ מִיַּיִן:

לְרִיחַ שְׁמֶנֶךָ טוֹבִים 3  
שֶׁמֶן הַזָּרָק שְׁמֶךָ  
עַל־כֵּן עֲלָמוֹת אֲהַבּוּךָ:

מִשְׁכֵּנִי אַחֲרֶיךָ נָרוּצָה 4

הַבִּיאֵנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרְי  
נְגִילָה וְנִשְׁמָחָה בְּךָ  
נִזְכֶּרָה דְּדִידָךְ מִיַּיִן

מִשְׁרִים אֲהַבּוּךָ:

1:2 יִשְׁקֵנִי *yisshaqeni* evokes the phonetically similar *yašqeni* “O that he would let me drink,” associated with “wine.” The association between kissing and wine-drinking is more explicit in *’eššaqka* “I would kiss you” and *’ašqeka* “I would give you to drink,” 8:1-2. “Make me drunk” in the present translation attempts to capture the effect of this wordplay.

יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי־טוֹבִים דְּדִידָךְ מִיַּיִן *yisshaqeni mi(n)-nešiqot pihu, ki tobim dodeyka mi(n)-yayin*, literally “O that he would kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your lovmaking is better than wine.” The shift from the third to the second person typically occurs in direct addresses to persons of a higher social

standing, as in Gen. 44:7 “Why does my lord speak [third person] such words as these? Far be it from your [second person] servants. . . .” The most plausible explanation is that the courtly, ceremonious tone of the Shulamite’s address to her lover belongs to their fantasy world, in which he figures as her “king,” her very own “Solomon,” as it were; see comment on *ha-melek* in 1:4,12.

דֹּדַיך *dodeyka*, literally “your *dodim*.” The plural *dodim* is a comprehensive term for lovemaking, that is, kisses and caresses as well as intercourse. Compare Prov. 7:18, Ezek. 16:8, 23:17; in the Song see 1:4, 4:10, 5:1, 7:13. The word “love” in most translations is too general and evasive.

1:3 לְרִיחַ שְׁמָנֶיךָ טוֹבִים *le-reah šemaneyka tobim*, literally “as regards scent, your oils are good.” Unusual in Hebrew as in English, this syntax may have been deliberately chosen for the sake of chiasmus: (A) *tobim* “good,” (B) *dodeyka* “your lovemaking,” (C) *mi(n)-yayin* “than wine,” followed by (C) *le-reah* “as regards scent,” (B) *šemaneyka* “your oils,” (A) *tobim* “good.”

שֵׁמֶן תּוּרָאק שְׁמֶךָ *šemen turaq šemeḳa*, literally “your name is *šemen turaq*.” Enigmatic. The various interpretations proposed—“your name is oil poured out” / “Turaq oil,” etc.—are problematic for grammatical or lexical reasons. All that can be said with certainty is that in the Bible a name often reflects a person’s characteristic traits (compare 1 Sam. 25:25), and that the “oil” here, whatever its identity, is symbolic of the young man’s sensual attractiveness.

The Peshitta has “oil of myrrh.” We borrowed “myrrh and aloes” from 4:14 as a concrete referent for scent; compare 1:13 and Ps. 45:9.

עַלְמוֹת *‘alamot* “young women, girls.” The word does not imply virginity, contra the interpretation of *‘almah* in Isa. 7:14 as “virgin,” based on the Septuagint’s *parthenos*, which can mean “maiden” or “virgin.”

עַל־כֵּן עַלְמוֹת אֶהְבֶּךָ *‘al ken ‘alamot ‘ahēbūka*, literally “therefore young women love you.” While *‘ahab* in the Bible has a wide range of meanings, from spiritual to sexual—in the story of Amnon and Tamar it means “lust” (2 Sam. 13:4,15)—in the Song this verb most often refers to erotic love. Since the lover is described in purely sensual terms here (his kisses, the sweet scent of his oils), *‘ahab* probably refers to physical attraction.

1:4 מִשְׁכְּנִי אַחֲרַיִךְ נִרְוָצָה *moškeni ‘ahareyka naruṣah* “Take me by the hand [literally pull/draw me after you], let us run!”

הַבִּיאֵנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ *hebi’ani ha-melek*, literally “the king has brought me.” Here and in 1:12, “the king” is to be understood as the Shulamite’s courtly epithet for her lover. It is by no means a reference to King Solomon as a rival for her love, as some have supposed. The explanatory paraphrase, “my lover, my king” here is patterned after the chains of affectionate epithets in the Song, notably “my sister, my bride” in 4:10, or the longer chain in 5:2.

חדריו *hadarav* “into his chambers.” The king’s “chambers” are best explained in terms of the lovers’ vocabulary of make-believe. Since most of their erotic encounters take place out of doors, this word may designate the sheltered or hidden places in the woods or vineyards where they meet (see below on the king’s “couch,” “our bed,” and especially “our houses,” 1:12,16,17). Note also the expression *heder be-heder*, literally “a chamber within a chamber, an inner chamber,” a metaphor for a secret hiding place, 1 Kings 20:30, 22:25; 2 Kings 9:2.

נָגִילָה וְנִשְׁמְחָה בָּךְ *nagilah ve-nišmehah bāk*, literally “let us exult and rejoice in you.” This clause with its paired verbs recalls a formulaic expression of festivity and joy in Ps. 118:24 *nagilah ve-nišmehah bo* “let us exult and rejoice in it,” and similarly Isa. 25:9.

נִזְכִּירָה דְּרִיךְ מַיִן *nazkirah dodeyka mi(n)-yayin*, literally, “let us recount/proclaim/extol [compare Ps. 45:18] your lovemaking more than wine.” The segment *dodeyka mi(n)-yayin* “your lovemaking more than wine” is repeated here verbatim from 1:2 as a kind of refrain. This may explain the interpretively difficult “*your* lovemaking” where one would rather expect something like “our lovemaking” or simply “lovemaking” (as in Prov. 7:18, “Come, let us take our fill of lovemaking till morning”).

Similarly, one might have expected simply “Let us exult and rejoice” rather than “exult and rejoice *in you*,” in the preceding phrase. The final word *bāk* may serve no other purpose than to allude to the formulaic expression of joy just quoted, *nagilah ve-nišmehah bo* “Let us exult and rejoice in it.”

These two difficult clauses have given rise to various explanations. For example, it has been suggested that in using “we” in her address to her lover, the Shulamite is projecting her own love for him onto other young women. This is plausible, given his attractiveness to women (1:3,4), but it is far more likely that *nagilah*, *nišmehah*, and *nazkirah* have as their subject just the two lovers, as in “Take me by the hand, let us run together” earlier in the same verse.

מִיֶּשְׁרִים אֱהָבֻךְ *meyšarim ’ahebūka*, literally “indeed/ truly/ rightly they love you.” The emphatic force of the adverbial *meyšarim* is enhanced by its position before the verb, as also in Ps. 58:2, 75:3.

This refrain echoes the statement at the end of 1:3. Refrains in the Song often occur with some variation in the wording, as here.

\* \* \* \* \*

2:4 Now he has brought me to the house of wine,  
and his flag over me is love.

5 Let me lie among vine blossoms,  
in a bed of apricots!  
I am in the fever of love.

6 His left hand beneath my head,  
his right arm  
holding me close.

7 Daughters of Jerusalem, swear to me  
by the gazelles, by the deer in the field,  
that you will never awaken love  
until it is ripe.

2:4 הביאני אל־בית היין  
ורגלו עלי אהבה:

5 סמכוני בא־שִׁשׁוֹת  
רפדוני בתפוחים  
כי־חולת אהבה אני:

6 שִׁמְאלוֹ תַּחַת לְרִאשִׁי  
וְיְמִינוֹ תִּחְבְּקֵנִי:

7 הַשִּׁבְעָתִי אַחֲכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם  
בְּצִבְאוֹת אוֹ בְּאֵילוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה  
אִם־תִּעְיְרוּ וְאִם־תִּעְזְרוּ אֶת־הָאַהֲבָה  
עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ:

2:4 *beyt ha-yayin*, literally “house of wine.” This could be a tavern or banquet hall (compare Esther 7:8), but it is more likely to be a metaphor for a place in the fields or orchards where the lovers meet to make love. “He brought me to the house of wine” recalls the scene in 1:4, “He brought me into his chambers,” where lovemaking and wine are also associated.

*ve-diglo ‘alay ‘ahaḇah*, literally “his banner over me [being] love,” a circumstantial clause, expressing simultaneity with the main action (“he brought me”). A poetic image of her delight in his exuberant demonstration of love; compare the image in Ps. 20:6, “Let us raise our banner [*nidgol*] in the name of our God,” where the verb “to raise a banner” is derived from *degel* “banner, flag.”



Scholars who resort to Akkadian *dgl* (*dagalu*) “to see,” and by extension “to intend,” have produced translations like “his intention/ intent towards me was love” (Pope, Fox). But Hebrew *dgl* does not have this meaning. Nor is it likely that a language would borrow such a basic verb as “to see,” or one of its nominal derivatives, for which it has its own words (*ra’ah*, *hibbit*, *mabbat*, etc.). Rather, the semantic range of the various biblical words of this root follows a clear derivational progression: “banner, flag” → “to raise a banner” (see note on *nigdol*, just above) → “raise high, make conspicuous.” The latter meaning is attested in the two passive formations of this root in the Song, *dagul* in 5:10, and probably *nidgalotin* 6:4,10.

2:5 סמך כחשישון רפדתי בפרחם *sammekuni ba-’ašišot*, *rappeduni ba-tappuḥim*, approximately “prop me up, make my bed among [or “cover me with”] *’ašišot*, cushion me with/prop me up among apricots” (similarly Fox). The Shulammitte dramatically proclaims her erotic hunger for her lover; apricots are “his” fruit, 2:3. *’Ašišot* is variously translated as “raisins” and “raisin cakes” (compare 2 Sam 6:19); according to Fox, one possible meaning is “inflorescence,” i.e., blossoms. The word remains enigmatic.

The preposition *b-* may have an instrumental sense “with, by means of,” as it is commonly translated. But it may also mean “among,” as in 1:8, 2:3,16. For the roots *smk* and *rpd* with these meanings, see Judg. 4:18 *šemikah* “rug,” “cover,” or “blanket” (in the older spelling with *ś*); Job 17:13 “I spread [*rippadti*] my bed”; Job 41:22 (in English versions 41:30) “he spreads out [*yirpad*]. See also Song 3:10, *reḥidah* “cushions.” For the image of spreading a bed as a prelude to an erotic encounter, see Prov. 7:16: “I have decked my couch with coverings.”

For the use of the masculine plural in general requests addressing “everybody,” compare Isa. 42:10 “sing (*širu*) to the Lord a new song”; 1 Kings 1:2 “let a young maiden be sought [literally “let them seek,” *yeḇaqqešu*].”

Translations like “sustain me with” and “refresh/comfort me with” (RSV, NEB, Pope) are on shaky ground. The English verbs “sustain,” “comfort,” and “strengthen” may refer to physical or spiritual support as well as to providing food, but this is not at all true of verbs of the root *smk* “prop up,” help to walk straight,” Ps. 3:6, 51:14, 145:14,—and even less so of *rpd*. The semantic range of a linguistic expression in one language does not guarantee the same range in another.

חולת אהבה *holat ’ahabāh*, literally “sick with love,” in this context meaning “faint from the intensity of erotic yearning.” For *’ahab* “to desire,” see note 1:3.

2:6 סמך ימין תחת ראשי *šemo’lo taḥat le-ro’si* ..., literally “his left hand under my head and his right embracing me.” A stylized representation of lovemaking. This refrain is repeated in 8:3. Compare a parallel from the Sumerian Sacred Marriage Rite (Kramer, 105): “Your right hand you have placed on my vulva, / Your left stroked my head.” For an ancient Mesopotamian clay plaque showing lovers embracing on a bed in this posture, see Wolkstein and Kramer, 43. For *habbeq* “to embrace” in a sexual sense, see Prov. 5:20. The phrase “holding me close” here is adopted from Peter Jay’s translation.

2:7 אֲנִי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי *hišba'ti 'etkēn*, literally “I hereby adjure you.” With this oath formula, repeated in 3:5 and 8:4, the Shulamite imparts her own insight to her “audience,” the daughters of Jerusalem, warning them against arousing love prematurely, before the time is right. The emphatic tone of this teaching with its repeated “never, never” is strongly reminiscent of Wisdom literature; compare Prov. 31:2, where “do not!” appears six times in a row. Underlying this statement is the belief that everything has its proper time of ripening, in human maturation as in nature; compare 2:11–13, 8:8–11.

The typical oath in the Bible is sworn in the name of God, e.g. Deut. 6:13, Josh. 9:18, 2 Chron. 15:14. Here the oath is reconfigured to suit the Song’s landscape with its animal imagery of gazelles and deer in the fields. This is not an ironic reference to biblical religion but an artful remaking of a conventional usage.

The use of the perfect tense (here *hišba'ti*) in the sense of a present is common in oaths and other solemn assertions, e.g. Jer. 22:5 “I hereby swear [*nišba'ti*],” Gen. 14:22 “I hereby lift [*harimoti*] my hand to the Lord in oath.” See WO, 488.

Notice the masculine plural form *'etkēn*, instead of the expected feminine *'etkēn* demanded by standard classical Hebrew; or 5:3 *'aṭanneḇem*, for expected *'aṭanneḇen*; similarly *ta'iru*, *te'oreru* in this verse; 5:8 *timše'u*, *taggidu*, etc. The gradual replacement of the feminine plural forms by the corresponding masculine forms is one of the indicators of the lateness of the Song. The special feminine plurals survive only vestigially, in the forms on *-nah*, 3:11.

אֲנִי לֹא אֶתְעוֹרֵר וְאֲנִי לֹא אֶתְעוֹרֵר *'im ta'iru ve-'im te'oreru*, literally “not/never to awaken and never to arouse,” here applying to erotic arousal, compare 8:5. For *ha'ir* and *'orer* “to arouse, stir up, incite, excite,” see Isa. 42:13 “stirs up [*ya'ir*] fury,” Jer. 51:11 “stirred up [*he'ir*] the spirit,” Job 3:8 “skilled to rouse up [*'orer*] Leviathan,” Prov. 10:12 “hatred stirs up [*te'orer*] strife.”

While usually meaning “if,” the particle *'im* is regularly used with a negative sense in oaths, as in 2 Kings 5:16 *hay 'adonay ... 'im 'eqqah* “as the Lord lives, I will not take a thing,” Gen 14:22–23, 21:23, 2 Sam. 11:11, etc. The semantic shift from a conditional to a negative meaning may have happened as follows: “I swear, *if* I were to commit this crime (may such and such an evil come upon me)” → “I swear *not* to commit . . .,” with the negative consequence left unspoken.

\* \* \* \* \*

- 6:11 Then I went down to the walnut grove  
to see the new green by the brook,  
to see if the vine had budded,  
if the pomegranate trees were in flower.
- 12 And oh! before I was aware,  
she sat me in the most lavish of chariots.

6:11 אֶל־גִּנַּת אֲגֹז יֵרְדֹתִי  
לִרְאוֹת בְּאֵפֶי הַנֶּחֱל  
לִרְאוֹת הִפְרֹחַת הַגֶּפֶן  
הַנִּצֹּר דְּרֵמָנִים:

12 לֹא יָדַעְתִּי נַפְשִׁי  
שֶׁמָּחֵנִי מִרֶכְבּוֹת עֲמִירָדִיב:

6:11 At least some of the interpretive difficulties of 6:11–12 dissolve if the young man is understood as the speaker of both verses, rather than the Shulamite, as has generally been assumed (KJV, RSV, Pope, Fox, Murphy, and others). Although there is no grammatical way to tell the gender of the speaker in 6:11, the garden and fruit symbolism offers an important clue. Throughout the Song the garden is a symbol of the Shulamite and her sexuality: she is the “locked garden” (4:12), inaccessible to anyone but her lover; he alone is invited to the garden (4:16), and he alone enters it (5:1). He describes her as a “garden spring” (4:15), and addresses her as “the one who dwells in the gardens” (8:13). Only she is associated with both vines and pomegranates in erotic contexts (1:6, 4:13, 7:9,13, 8:2); the only fruit associated with him is the apricot. For all these reasons, it makes better sense to see the young man as the one “going down” to the garden in 6:11. This verse parallels 6:2, where the lover “has gone down to his garden.”

The preceding argumentation is supported by a more general consideration. In the customary expression for sexual intercourse in the Bible, the male is the agent: “he came to her,” never “she came to him.” Correspondingly, in the Song, it is always the man who comes to visit the woman, not the other way around: compare the two visits to the Shulamite, 2:8–14, 5:2–6; and the visits to the garden, 5:1, 6:2. Similarly, in the two parting scenes, 2:17 and 8:14, her request that he “run away” presupposes that he has come to visit her.

גִּנַּת אֲגֹז *ginnat 'egoz*, literally “nut garden.” For *ginnah* “garden” see Esther 1:5; 7:7,8. A biblical hapax, *'egoz* is the common term in post-biblical Hebrew for nuts, specifically walnuts (its close phonetic cognates suggest an old shared Mediterranean word, compare Arabic *jawz*; Ethiopic, Syriac, Persian *gawz*; Aramaic *'egoza*, *'egoz*; Armenian *engoiz*). Here likely used as a collective noun for the trees rather than the fruit, paralleling the vine and the pomegranates in the following. Compare 2:3, *tappuahè*.

אֲבֵי הַנַּחַל *'ibbey ha-naḥal*. Based on Job 8:12 *be-'ibbo* "in its prime," the phrase is usually taken to refer to fresh young vegetation. *Naḥal* "valley, wadi," but also "stream, torrent, brook," which would fit the water imagery associated with the Shulamite, 4:12,15.

6:12 Generally conceded to be the most difficult verse in the Song, it has received the widest range of interpretations imaginable, and countless suggested emendations, and at times has been omitted as untranslatable (Segal, Falk). See Pope 548 ff. for an overview. The translation proposed here is based on the Masoretic Text, with a single crucial emendation at the end of the verse.

לֹא יָדַעְתִּי נַפְשִׁי *lo' yada'ti naṣṣi*, literally "I did not know myself." A fixed idiom denoting the unexpectedness of the event described in the next clause, approximately meaning: "Before I knew myself [such and such happened]". For the connection between "not knowing" and the perception of suddenness, see also uses such as Isa. 47:11 "ruin shall come to you suddenly, and you will not know," Jer. 50:24 "I set a snare for you, and you were trapped unawares," literally "and you did not know" (Ginsburg).

But *lo' yada'ti naṣṣi* may be understood in a different way, namely as an expression of deep emotional agitation. Just as in the corresponding English phrase "I was beside myself with . . .," the Hebrew expression marks only the intensity, not the nature, of the emotion; the latter is revealed by the context. (In Modern Hebrew literature, *lo' yada'ti naṣṣi* can indeed be followed by phrases such as "with grief/despair" as well as "with joy/delight." Compare also "my innards stirred for him," note 5:4.) In the one other occurrence of *lo' yada'ti naṣṣi* in the Bible, Job 9:21 "I do not know myself, I loathe my life," the context is one of despair. In 6:12, on the other hand, the context is clearly one of great joy, excitement, or amazement. In either interpretation, *neṣeš* "self," literally "soul," functions as an integral component of the idiom (marking reflexivity, as it does occasionally also in other contexts, e.g. Isa. 44:20, Prov. 22:5). Hence *neṣeš* is not the subject of the following verb, as implied in translations of the type "my soul/fancy/desire has made/set/ hurled me" (KJV and others).

שָׂמַתְנִי מִרֶכֶבֹּת עַמִּי-נָדִיב *samatni markebot 'ammi-nadib*, literally "she put/placed me in the chariots of 'ammi-nadib." We understand this as the young man's metaphorical description of his erotic encounter with the Shulamite.

A key to the enigma of *'ammi-nadib* may be found in a poetic expression that occurs in some of the most ancient texts in the Bible, "the nobles of the people." It manifests itself in this form, or with minor variations, in Num. 21:18 *nedibey ha-'am*, Ps. 47:10 *nedibey 'ammim* (with "people" in the plural), and Judges 5:2, 9, *be-hitnaddeḇ 'am*, *ha-mitnaddeḇim ba-'am*, referring to those who "behaved nobly among the people" (two forms of root *ndb* followed by *'am* "people"). But most illuminating to the language and imagery of Song 6:12 are two parallel texts, Ps. 113:7-8, "He raises the poor from the dust, lifts up the needy from the ash heap, to seat them with nobles, with the nobles of His people" (*le-hošibi 'im nedibim*, *'im nedibey 'ammo*) and 1 Sam. 2:8, with identical wording but a modified ending, "He raises the poor . . . , lifts up the needy . . . , to seat them with nobles [*'im nedibim*], granting them a seat of honor."

The expression “the nobles of the people” contains the same two components that make up *‘ammi-nadib*, though in reverse order. Hence, an emendation restoring the order would yield *nedib ‘ammi*, literally “the nobleman of my people,” or in a superlative sense “the most noble of my people.” Such an emendation would not be unique in the Bible. As Gordis (1933) has shown, the enigmatic Deut. 33:21 *sṗwn vyt’* defies all interpretation, until the order is reversed to *vyt’sṗwn* (a single word), which reads *va-yit’asseṗun* “and they gathered.” This emendation, too, is supported by the context: thus restored, Deut. 33:21 reveals itself as semantically identical with Deut. 33:5 *be-hit’asseṗ* “when (they) gathered.” Two other cases of erroneous inversions are Jer. 17:3 and Ezek. 24:17 (Zakovitch). The fact that *‘m* stands orthographically for both “with” and “people” may have contributed to the error in Song 6:12. And so probably did the clause-final position of *nadib* “nobleman” in 7:2.

To “seat with the nobles” means, in a concrete physical sense, to raise from the ground, to elevate someone to a higher location. But the image must also be understood in terms of its symbolism: to grace an individual by the gesture of letting him sit among the powerful. In Song 6:12 both associations come together: to be placed “in the chariot of the most noble of my people” evokes the notion of an “elevation,” a grace granted by the Shulamite to her lover, in this case serving as a metaphor for the erotic act. The metaphor of the chariot performs a double role here: (1) a royal chariot is a place of great honor, as in the case of Joseph the viceroy, Gen. 41:43, and compare the expression in Isa. 22:18, “the chariots of your pride.” Similarly, letting someone ride a horse, Esther 6:9, 11, 1 Kings 1:33–38, or ride “the high places of the earth” Deut. 32:13, Isa. 58:14, Hab. 3:19. (2) In addition, in the context of Song 6:12, the “chariot” has a sexual connotation, evoking an image of riding, as in “my mare,” 1:9. The Song in 6:12 thus uses for an erotic purpose a specific topos that is used elsewhere in the Bible in a nonerotic sense.

In this analysis, there is a thematic connection between two sets of verses: the anticipation of the erotic encounter in 4:16 “let my lover come to his garden” is followed by the fulfillment in 5:1 “I have come to my garden.” Similarly, the anticipation of 6:11 “I went down to the walnut grove to see if . . .” is followed by the fulfillment in 6:12 “she sat me. . .”

Finally, a few grammatical clarifications:

The plural “chariots” is the so-called plural of local extension; compare note 6:2 on *gannim*.

For the superlative sense of *nedib ‘ammi* “the most noble of my people” (instead of the literal “the nobleman of my people”), compare similar *semikut*-constructions listed in note 3:7, under *mi(n)-gibborey yiśra’el*. Taken in the superlative sense, the “chariot of the most noble of my people” implies something like “the most wonderful, most noble of chariots.” The association of the Shulamite with nobility is all the more meaningful in the context of her epithet in 7:2.

The use of *šam* “to place something” without a preposition “in/on/at” is common in Hebrew: Gen.28:11, Exod.40:29, 1 Sam. 19:13. (The same applies to other verbs, as in Gen. 18:1 “to sit at” and elsewhere.)

\* \* \* \* \*

8:5      There, beneath the apricot tree,  
            your mother conceived you,  
            there you were born.  
            In that very place, I awakened you.

6          Bind me as a seal upon your heart,  
            a sign upon your arm,  
  
            for love is as fierce as death,  
            its jealousy bitter as the grave.  
            Even its sparks are a raging fire,  
            a devouring flame.

7          Great seas cannot extinguish love,  
            no river can sweep it away.  
  
            If a man tried to buy love  
            with all the wealth of his house,  
            he would be despised.

8:5      תַּחַת הַתְּפֹּאֵחַ עֹרַרְתִּיךְ  
            שָׁמָּה חִבְּלָתְךָ אִמִּיךְ  
            שָׁמָּה חִבְּלָה יִלְדָתְךָ:

6          שִׁימֵנִי כְחוֹתֶם עַל-לִבֶּךָ  
            כְּחוֹתֶם עַל-זְרֹעֶךָ

כִּי-עֲזָה כְמוֹת אֲדָמָה  
קָשָׁה כְּשֹׂאֵל קִנְיָה  
רֶשֶׁפִּיהָ רֶשֶׁפִּי אֵשׁ  
שִׁלְהִבְחִיהָ:

7          מִיָּם רַבִּים לֹא יִכְלֹוּ לְכַבּוֹת אֶת־הָאֵהָבָה  
            וְנִהְרֹת לֹא יִשְׁטֹפוּהָ

אִם-יִחַן אִישׁ אֶת־כָּל־הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ  
בְּאֲדָמָה  
בֹּזוּ יִבְזוּ לוֹ:

8:5      תַּחַת הַתְּפֹּאֵחַ עֹרַרְתִּיךְ *tahat ha-tappuah 'orartika*, literally  
“under the apricot tree I awakened you,” with “awaken” in the erotic sense, as in  
the adjurations 2:7, 3:5, 8:4. The erotic import is manifest in view of the  
implications of 2:3, where the Shulamite tells about sitting in the shade of the

apricot tree and tasting its fruit. In the symbolism of 2:3, the apricot is of course *his* fruit. The speaker here is the young woman, as the Masoretic Text vowing clearly indicates.

שָׁמָּה חִבֵּלְתָּךְ אִמִּי *sammah hibbelatka 'immeḳa*, literally “there your mother conceived you.” *Hibbel* (*pi'el*) “conceive, get pregnant,” as in Ps. 7:15 “He conceives evil [*yehabbell 'aven*], is pregnant with mischief, and gives birth to a lie.”

שָׁמָּה חִבֵּלָה יִלְדָתְךָ *sammah hibbelah yeladatka*, literally “there she conceived, gave birth to you,” i.e., “conceived and gave birth . . .,” with the coordinate verbs joined asyndetically, as in 8:2, “I will lead you, bring you.”

There can be little doubt that the conception and birth under the apricot tree must not be taken as realistic reportage, as in some commentaries. These details add a mythic dimension to the figure of the young man; the motif of a birth under a tree is found in many myths in antiquity (Pope, 663). But the association of birth and tree may have an additional explanation. In order to mate and give birth to their fawns, hinds often return to their own birthplace under a tree (Feliks, quoted in Hakham, 16). Since the young lover in the Song is repeatedly compared to a gazelle, 2:9, 17, 8:14, this association would be especially evocative.

Many versions translate along the lines of “there your mother conceived you, there the one who bore you conceived,” treating the last word of the sentence as if it were an epithet, “the one who gave birth to you,” parallel to the preceding “your mother.” In this understanding, only the conception takes place under the apricot tree, not the birth. But a reading with “the one who . . .” would require a participial form *yoladteka*, a word that is typically spelled with a *waw* (*ywldtk*), as in Song 6:9, Jer. 50:12, Prov. 17:25, 23:25, whereas the word in the present verse unmistakably indicates a verb in the perfect, *yeladatka*. In an alternative approach, Fox (cf. Grossberg, 488) suggests that the verb be understood as nominalized, literally “conceived [the] she-bore-you.” But this admittedly attractive proposal is not without its own problems. Nominalizations of verbs do of course occur but, significant to the case at hand, they typically function attributively, as genitives, or relative clauses, and not as the subject of a verb. Similarly WO, 87, n. 13.

8:6 שִׁמְנִי כְּחוֹתָם עַל-לִבֶּךָ . . . עַל-זְרוֹעֶךָ *simeni ka-hotam 'al libbeka . . . 'al zero'eka*, literally “Set me as a seal upon your heart, . . . your arm.” A seal on the heart and arm implies belonging, physical closeness, and intimacy. Seals or signets, made of metal or stone and often exquisitely engraved, were worn on the hand as a ring, higher up on the arm as an amulet, or on a cord around the neck, resting on the chest (Pope). A seal served as a form of identification, as in the story of Tamar and Judah (Gen. 38:18–26), and was numbered among a person's most precious possessions. Of deep symbolic significance, a seal stands for the owner's identity, honor, and fate, see Jer. 22:24, Hag. 2:23. For the weighty significance implied in placing an object of symbolic import on one's hand or heart, see Prov. 3:3, 6:21, 7:3, and Deut. 6:8, 11:18. (The verses in Deuteronomy furnish the biblical basis for the wearing of phylacteries.)



‘עֲזָה כְּמָוֶת *‘azzah kā-mavet* “as strong/fierce as death.” For ‘az specifically in the sense of “fierce” see Deut. 28:50 *‘az panim* “fierce of countenance,” Judg. 14:18 *‘az me-‘ari* “more fierce than the lion” (rather than “more strong”; compare Prov. 30:30, where the lion is proverbial for ferocity, not strength).

קָשָׁה כְּשֵׁאוֹל *qašah ki-še’ol*, literally “hard/cruel as Sheol.” Although Sheol is the personified netherworld in the biblical worldview (see Isa. 28:15,18, Ps. 89:49, Hab. 2:5), the word is often used simply as a synonym for “death.”

קִנְיָה *qin’ah* “jealousy,” as correctly noted by Fox (not “passion,” as in many modern translators and commentators). What is meant here is not jealousy as an independent force, but the jealousy that is a by-product of love, the jealousy ignited by love. The real focus of this line, as of the ones that follow, is love. We have added the “its” in “its jealousy” to clarify this point.

רֶשֶׁפֶּיָּה רִשְׁפֵּי עֵשׂ *rešapeyha rišpey ‘eš, šalhebetyah*, literally “its sparks are sparks of fire, an enormous flame.” The exact meaning of *rešep* is uncertain; in Job 5:7 the word has been widely understood as referring to sparks rising up from a fire. Taking “spark” as a metaphor for something very small, we see in Song 8:6 an intensification by way of contrast. The image moves from the sparks to the flame: love is so powerful that even its tiny sparks burn like great fires.

It has long been debated whether or not *šalhebetyah* contains the name of the God of Israel. While it is likely that *-yah* derives from “Yah,” the short form of “Yahweh,” this ending long ago lost its association with God’s name, and became simply a suffix denoting intensity, as in Jer. 2:31 *ma’pelyah* “thick darkness,” Ps. 118:5 *merhabyah* “great relief.” (For the semantic change involved, compare the expression 1 Sam. 14:15 *herdat ‘elohim* “a great terror,” literally “God’s terror,” and similarly Gen. 35:5, 1 Sam. 11:7, and others.) The very spelling of *šalhebetyah* as a single word supports this assessment, since the name “Yah” (God) is always spelled as a separate word, as in Ps. 115:18 *va-‘anaḥnu neḇarek yah* “but we will bless the Lord,” Exod. 15:2, 17:16, Ps. 68:19.

8:7 אִם יִתֵּן אִישׁ ... בְּאֶהְבָּה *‘im yitten ‘iš ... ba-‘ahabāh*, literally “if a man gave [all the wealth of his house] for love,” i.e. traded it, or tried/offered/intended to trade it, in exchange for love. The point of this aphorism is that love is beyond all material value, and cannot be bought for any price. Hence anyone attempting to buy love would be considered a fool. An alternate reading—the man who gives up everything for love is mocked by an uncomprehending world—seems less fitting in this context: the poet is praising the greatness of love, a cosmic force, not bemoaning the small-mindedness of human beings. The topos of comparison with mere earthly wealth continues in 8:11–12.

For the idiomatic expression, “to give all the wealth of one’s house,” or “half of one’s house,” see 1 Kings 13:8 and Prov. 6:31. For the special sense of the preposition *b-* as used here, compare Gen. 29:18 *‘e‘ēbodkā ... be-raḥel* “I will serve you for [i.e. in order to obtain] Rachel.”

בֹּז יֵבֹזוּ לוֹ *boz yabūzu lo* “he would be utterly scorned/despised” (the so-called absolute infinitive preceding the verb for strong affirmation; see WO, 586). One may perceive a closure here, formally echoing 8:1: “If only you were . . . , no one would scorn me,” “If a man gave . . . , he would be scorned.” The formal similarity is more sharply profiled in Hebrew because of the presence of the verbs *yitten* and *būz* in both verses.

Despite the obvious differences in purpose and tone, this aphorism recalls the sayings in Matt. 13:44–46, 16:26. In each case, something of material worth is weighed against a spiritual value such as love, the soul, the Kingdom of Heaven.

## *Collaboration, Computers, and Collegiality*

THE TWO ARTICLES THAT FOLLOW ARE THE PRODUCT of a special form of collaboration. David Blumenthal and Michael Broyde are not partners in each other's essay; indeed, each has served as a critic of the other's paper. Yet there is more than a strand of cooperation present. So too, these essays were written when both authors were just growing comfortable with the use of computer-generated data; the computer and its research strengths provided the means that allowed Blumenthal and Broyde to collect data that had not been previously presented on this topic, thus the two words in the title. The collegiality and friendship that provide the background for these two papers cannot be expressed in words.

In 1992 Blumenthal raised the question of the absence of God's name in Song of Songs with Broyde, who replied that God's name was indeed mentioned in Song of Songs, and that Blumenthal was mistaken. After some investigation, it turned out that Broyde's initial assertion was not obviously correct, and the question was raised as to why this was not generally discussed within the exegetic community, rabbinic and otherwise. Indeed, a brief survey of the rabbinic commentaries did not produce any discussion of this topic, as for example, is found in even a casual review of the Book of Esther. At that point, our two interests parted for a brief while. Blumenthal pursued the question of feminist interpretation of the Bible, which Broyde critiqued without remorse, while Broyde investigated the question of rabbinic understanding of Song of Songs and the names of God, an area of investigation that Blumenthal felt did not answer the pressing problem posed.

Memos were exchanged, and, after a while, results were tallied. Broyde argued that the absence of God's name in Song of Songs is discussed in the various rabbinic sources, and more significantly, explains the rabbinic doctrine of "defilement of the hands" as it relates to canonical texts. Blumenthal felt that the basic silence of the rabbinic sources, combined with the vagueness of the references to God, posed a significant problem that can only be solved outside the rabbinic framework; a feminist interpretation can provide such a framework.

Computers were called on to analyze the data and to tally the various uses of God's name. Reflecting different research interests, one of us used the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project on CD-ROM, and the other used Davka's CD-ROM with its array of biblical commentaries. Additional sources were collected from the computer and incorporated. After a second round of research, still more material from the CD-ROMs was incorporated, both in text and tabular form.

Blumenthal and Broyde have reached an intellectual impasse. Each thinks that the solution he writes solves the problem of God's name in Song of Songs; yet, each solution is completely different from the other. Both are presented to the reader; starker contrast is harder to find.

*—Michael J. Broyde & David R. Blumenthal*

# *Defilement of the Hands, Canonization of the Bible, and the Special Status of Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs*

MICHAEL J. BROYDE

## Introduction

IN VARIOUS PLACES IN TALMUDIC LITERATURE THE ability of three books of the Bible—Esther, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes—to make one's hands unclean (מטמא את הידים) is doubted, with various Talmudic authorities ruling that each of these works does not defile the hands.<sup>2</sup> While none of the opinions are accepted as normative and thus do not cast doubt on the presence of any of these works within the Jewish canon,<sup>3</sup> these opinions and how to understand them remain problematic within Jewish tradition. Two modern schools of thought have arisen to explain the dispute concerning “clean hands.” One asserts that those authorities who state that these works do not defile the hands also rule that these books are not part of the canon. Solomon Zeitlin stated this clearly:

According to [some opinions within] the Talmud the book of Esther also does not defile the hands, *which means that the book was not canonized*. . . . Therefore as late as the third century, it was recorded in the name of Samuel that Esther does not defile the hands—that is, *Esther does not belong in the Canon*.<sup>4</sup> [emphasis added]

According to this approach, the identity of the books of the Jewish Bible were not beyond dispute even as late as the year 200 C.E.

Sid Z. Leiman, in his book on this topic argues to the contrary. He states:

It appears likely that the biblical canon was closed prior to the earliest of the Talmudic discussions. . . . Speculation on the date of the closing of the biblical canon, based upon evidence from Talmudic passages treating books defiling the hands, would appear gratuitous. The rabbis were questioning the inspired status of some of the books in the biblical canon already closed; *they were neither discussing canonicity nor closing the biblical canon*.<sup>5</sup>

---

MICHAEL BROYDE is an assistant professor in the Department of Religion and an adjunct professor at the School of Law in Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, where he is also a fellow in the law and religion program. He was ordained at Yeshiva University and received his law degree from New York University.

According to this approach, “the Talmudic and midrashic evidence is entirely consistent with a second century B.C. dating for the closing of the biblical canon.”<sup>6</sup>

This article will attempt to address three issues relevant to this dispute: First, this article will survey how the medieval Jewish commentaries (*rishonim*) and early modern Jewish commentaries (early *achronim*) understand the Talmudic dispute as to whether these works defiled the hands. Did they relate it to presence in the canon?<sup>7</sup> Secondly, this article notes that there are normative opinions within Jewish law which assign to Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs a status different from the other books of the *Writings* (*Ketuvim*) and discusses how that result is justified. Finally this article notes that there is a clear feature in common for these three biblical works—the complete absence of the Tetragrammaton (שם המפורש) from these three works (and from no other books of the Bible)—which explains why one might assign to them a different status from all the other books of the Bible, while still never doubting their membership in the canon or why, perhaps, a Talmudic authority might even doubt their membership in the canon.

### A. What is “Defiling of Hands”?

Defiling the hands is a status of ritual purity (or impurity) that is completely rabbinic in nature and was enacted by the Talmudic Sages *not* to promote ritual purity, but to protect holy works from destruction or desecration.<sup>8</sup> Essentially, the Sages of the Talmud observed people would store *terumah* (a “sacred” food) in the ark with holy scrolls saying “both are holy.” In order to prevent this conduct, which apparently led to rats, mice, and weasels eating the scrolls as well as the sacred food, the Sages enacted a series of rabbinic decrees designed to deter this conduct.<sup>9</sup> The initial decree was that the torah scrolls defiled one’s hands; thus, a person could not directly touch sacred scrolls and then sacred food. Secondly, they decreed that if one touched a sacred scroll and then touched sacred food, that food became ritually unclean (and could not be eaten). Finally, they decreed that when one touched sacred food it defiled one’s hands, thus preventing one from first touching food and then touching sacred scrolls. The effect of these decrees were to prevent one from storing food and scrolls together or to go immediately from one to another without first washing the hands.

From the Talmud, however, it is clear that this decree was limited to certain types of sacred texts: not all sacred texts defiled the hands. Thus Tosephta (Yadayim 2:12) recounts that written-out blessings and certain verses do not defile the hands. While the Talmud does not explain this particular insight directly, the discussion in Talmud Shabbat 116–118

concerning those sacred texts which can be saved from a fire on the Sabbath does explicitly link salvation from the fire with the presence of God's name. Indeed, this is recounted in Shulchan Aruch quite clearly.<sup>10</sup>

## **B. The Talmudic Dispute as Understood by the Commentaries**

The mishnah in Kelayim 15:6 recounts:

All books defile the hands except for the book of the Azara.<sup>11</sup>

The mishnah in Yadayim 3:5 elaborates on this:

All books in the Bible defile the hands. Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes defile the hands. Rabbi Yehuda states that Song of Songs defiles the hands and Ecclesiastes is in dispute. Rabbi Yossi states that Ecclesiastes does not defile the hands and Song of Songs is in dispute.<sup>12</sup>

The Talmud in Megillah 7a recounts the following dispute concerning the book of Esther:

Rabbi Yehuda says in the name of Samuel: The Book of Esther does not defile the hands. Is this to be understood to mean that Samuel rules that Esther was not written with divine inspiration? But does not Samuel himself say that Esther was written with divine inspiration; Rather [Samuel rules] that Esther was said to be read and not to be written. Let us ask: Rabbi Meir states "Ecclesiastes does not defile the hands and there is a dispute as to whether Song of Songs defiles the hands." Rabbi Yossi states Song of Songs defiles the hands and Ecclesiastes is in dispute. Rabbi Shimon states: Ecclesiastes is one of the cases where Beit Shammai is more liberal than Beit Hillel, but Ruth, Song of Songs and Esther certainly defile the hands. This is in accordance with Rabbi Yehoshua who states: As learned "Rabbi Shimon ben Mennasiah states: Ecclesiastes does not defile the hands since it is the wisdom of Solomon."<sup>13</sup>

The first question is what is the underlying basis for Samuel, Rabbi Mennasiah, Rabbi Meir, and Rabbi Yossi's rule that various works do not defile the hands. Why should one text "defile the hands" and another not? Indeed, an examination of the Talmudic sources where "defiling of the hands" is mentioned, reveals that sometimes the question of whether a work "defiles the hands" is asked about a clearly canonical work with a special status (such as written to be erased)<sup>14</sup> or about a work of the apocryphal literature such as the wisdom of Ben-Sira,<sup>15</sup> and sometimes it is asked about heretical works such as the Gospels.<sup>16</sup> There are even occasions where defiling of the hands is discussed unrelated to any text at all (such as whether remains from sacrifices defile the hands).<sup>17</sup> What then is meant when the status of defiling the hands is discussed for Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs?

An examination of the early commentaries allows one to conclude that two distinctly different understandings of Samuel's position are presented. Some early commentaries explain that the dispute is about membership in the canon; while others explain the dispute to be about a lesser issue of ritual purity.

### 1: A Dispute about Canon Membership

That some understand the dispute about whether Esther is really in the canon is clear. For example, Rabbi Yom Tov Ashbelli (Ritva) commenting on Samuel's statement in Megillah 7a explains that Samuel rules that Esther "is not within the *kitvai hakodesh*<sup>18</sup> (canon), upon which the Sages decreed that one who touches them, even with washed hands,<sup>19</sup> has his hands (secondarily) defiled for the purposes of terumah."<sup>20</sup> Similar sentiments can be found in the name of Rav Hai Gaon who is quoted in *Otzar Hagonim* as following:

You asked whether the law is like Samuel in that Esther does not defile the hands. For what practical purpose is it necessary to answer this question? Do we now observe the rules of unclean hands and do we have terumah and kodesh? Rather, as a matter of law the ruling is not like Samuel since he is a single opinion and the rule is like the anonymous mishnah; *also don't all of Israel consider Esther to be in the Bible?*<sup>21</sup>

From the last section of his answer, it is clear that Rav Hai Gaon understands Samuel to be of the opinion that Esther is not one of the books of the Bible (כחבי קודש) as he resolves that the law is not like Samuel since "don't all of Israel consider Esther to be in the Bible?" Similar sentiments can be implied from the comments of Meiri,<sup>22</sup> as well as perhaps Rabbi Asher,<sup>23</sup> Rabbi Aderet,<sup>24</sup> and Tosaphot Yeshanim.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, even these commentaries acknowledge that Samuel accepts that Esther is to be read on Purim from a text/scroll;<sup>26</sup> however it does not have the status of "written torah" but rather has the status of some sort of "oral torah" which was to be written down as part of a rabbinic decree relating to its use as a ritual text.<sup>27</sup>

These early commentaries could reply that the fact that Rabbi Shimon ben Mennassiah expounds on Ecclesiastes and Samuel expounds on Esther need not indicate that it is canonical, and that it is sufficient that it be semi-inspired to be expounded on. The status of Ecclesiastes according to Rabbi Shimon ben Mennasiah, as understood by these authorities might be similar to a work such as *Megilat Tanit* which is sometimes introduced with "it is written" and sometimes with "it is learned"—semi-inspired and not canonical. Certainly, the fact that Rabbi Shimon ben Mennassiah expounds a law from the book of Ecclesiastes does not



automatically prove it to be canonical in his opinion, as Sanhedrin 100b and Bava Kama 91<sup>28</sup> expounds on a verse in Ben-Sira, a clearly noncanonical work.<sup>29</sup>

So too, in this author's opinion, these same authorities would understand Samuel, Rabbi Yossi, and Rabbi Meir, all of whom rule that either Esther, Ecclesiastes, or Song of Songs do not defile the hands, and would also rule them to be some form of sacred literature, but not part of the canon.<sup>30</sup> Particularly, Samuel's homiletic expounding of Esther<sup>31</sup> is not problematic. Samuel accepts that Esther is an inspired document and thus worthy of expounding even though it is not in the canon. The differences between being in the canon or not, according to Samuel's approach, would be relatively small for an inspired work; perhaps only limited to whether the item defiles the hands and other minor technical rules.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, it is interesting to note that Samuel never expounds on the book of Esther using the classical formulation "it is written," "the verse states," or "as it says" (the three ways in which one introduces a canonical verse). While this could be dismissed as mere coincidence, a survey of the practices of Rabbi Judah, Rabbi Yochanan, and Rabbi Eliezer, three contemporaries, reveals numerous times in which each of them can be found to use these phrases to introduce an exposition of the a verse from the Book of Esther.<sup>33</sup> The same is true for Rabbi Shimon ben Mennasiah and Rabbi Yosse's expounding of Ecclesiastes in *Hagigah* 1:6. Rabbi Meir does so only once (see *Ketubot* 72a and *Nedarim* 83b) and that same expounding from Rabbi Meir is recorded without that phrase elsewhere (see *Moed Katan* 28b).

Thus, these commentaries would disagree with the approach of Leiman, and agree with Zeitlin. They would argue that the dispute is about membership in the canon. Dr. Leiman accepts that these authorities rule that these texts are part of the canon *even though they are not written with divine inspiration*; Dr. Leiman points to the fact that Rabbi Shimon ben Menassiah himself elsewhere in the Talmud (see *Mishnah Hagigah* 1:6-7) expounds on a verse in Ecclesiastes to prove that it was canonical, even according to him, and that Samuel expounds on verses in Esther thus proving it canonical.<sup>34</sup>

## 2: A Dispute about Something Other than Membership in the Canon

Other commentaries clearly agree with Leiman and understand this dispute as relating only to whether these books defile the hands and not whether they are in the canon or not. This understanding of the dispute is much narrower, and reduces the issue discussed to a relatively technical discussion of ritual purity. Such appears to be the position taken by the author of the *Sefer HaEshkol*<sup>35</sup> who rejects Rav Hai Gaon's analysis (although accepting his conclusions) and insists that there are practical

differences between Samuel and his colleagues unrelated to whether Esther is in the canon or not.

This too appears to be the opinion of Maimonides who accepts the rationale of Rabbi Shimon ben Mennasiah<sup>36</sup> quoted in Megillah 7a and states that Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes “are from the wisdom of Solomon”<sup>37</sup> but nonetheless defile the hands. Maimonides would not have accepted any portion of Rabbi Mennasiah’s analysis were it predicated on lack of membership in the canon. Other commentaries too appear to adopt this understanding of the position of Samuel.<sup>38</sup>

It is, however, worth noting that certain theoretical (theological) differences as to the origins of Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs are presented even according to this understanding of the dispute.<sup>39</sup> Essentially, those Talmudic Sages who rule Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs do not defile the hands, but yet still include it in the canon, seek a diminished status for these two works because they are only the wisdom of Solomon and not written with divine inspiration.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, to a great extent that aspect of Rabbi Shimon ben Mennasiah’s contention has been accepted by many rabbinic authorities. For example, Rabbi David Ibn Zimra (Radvaz) states:

Question: You asked of me if there is a reason why the book of *Ecclesiastes* does not mention the name of God except for the name “elokim.”

Answer: According to those who rule that *Ecclesiastes* was written when Solomon was elderly, [it is recorded] that his [gentile] wives turned away his heart; thus the Bible witnesses “So built Solomon.” Since he did not rebuke his wives [for worshipping idols] the Bible considers him as if he himself worshipped idols and *the ruach hakodesh [divine presence] left him and his wisdom was reduced from being above the sun [very great]*. Thus he states many times in *Ecclesiastes* that he is “under the sun.” This is directly contrary to the wisdom of Solomon and thus there is no mention of God except for the word “elokim” which is a common name as it says “God came to Avimelech”; “Curse not God”; “God came to Bilam” and many others. So too, Song of Songs does not mention the name of God except in the word Solomon as the Sages state: “every Solomon mentioned in Song of Songs is holy except for ‘Thousands are to Solomon.’”<sup>41</sup>

While Radvaz makes no mention of the Talmudic or mishnaic texts explicitly, it is clear that his assertion that Ecclesiastes was not written with divine presence must be based on *Megillah* 7a and *Yadayim* 3:5.

### C. Halachic Issues Derived from Samuel’s Position

Section A demonstrated that Samuel’s ruling that Esther does not defile the hands was understood by some to mean that it was not part of the canon and by others to be a very limited technical ruling unrelated to membership in the canon. This section will demonstrate that there is a school of thought in

Jewish law that ruled that the second understanding of Samuel is the correct one and that Samuel is only commenting on technical issues and not membership in the canon; furthermore, and more significantly, this school of thought accepted Samuel's opinion as the correct one to be followed by normative Jewish law.

The understanding of Samuel's position which limits his ruling to a question of whether the text defiles the hands (and not whether it is in the canon) appears to have been a tenable or normative one among some of the early ashkenazic commentaries (early *achronim*). According to this approach, an Esther scroll does not have the same ritual status as other biblical scrolls. For example, there is a discussion in Jewish law as to whether an Esther Megillah needs to have a blank page at the beginning and at the end of it like a torah scroll or whether its rules are different and no such page is required. Rabbi Karo states that a megillah needs a blank page at the end and some blank material in the beginning like all other scrolls of biblical texts.<sup>42</sup> Rabbi Moshe Isserless (Rama), however, states that this is not the custom.<sup>43</sup> In his commentary on Tur (*Darchai Moshe*), Rama indicates that the custom of not having such a page is based on a source found in the practices of Mahari Weil (R. Jacob ben Judah Weil) in the laws of Purim §16. Mahari Weil states:

Mahari Segal stated that one can justify the practice of not having an extra page in the megillah, which is the custom [not to have], since *there is a Talmudic opinion that Megilat Esther was not given to be written through prophecy and is not called a book and thus we are not careful about touching it without a covering on our hands.*

Thus, Mahari Weil is indicating that the custom is to rely on the opinion of Samuel that Esther does not defile the hands. Similar sentiments can be found in the works of Rabbi Meir Eisenstadt, Responsa *Panim Meiros* (2:76) who states clearly:

Nonetheless that which Magen Avraham states that one should be careful (not to touch) a properly written *Esther* since from the silence of Maimonides we derive that the law is not like Samuel, who rules that *Esther* does not defile the hands [requires discussion]. The populace is not strict on this matter and *it appears to me to learn from the Talmud that we rule in accordance with Samuel that the Book of Esther does not defile the hands* from that which is recounted in Sanhedrin 100a that Levi bar Samuel and Rav Huna bar Cheah were repairing mantles for scrolls for Rabbi Yehuda. When they came to the *Esther* scroll they stated this scroll does not need a mantle. Rabbi Yehudah rebuked them, saying this sounds irreverent. From the words of Rashi it appears that Rabbi Judah agreed with their [legal] conclusion that no mantle is needed for an *Esther* Scroll, but objected to their manner of expressing it, which was irreverent.<sup>44</sup> We see from this that the law as they explained was correct and Esther does not defile the hands

and thus no mantle is needed. On this it is possible the many rely when they touch a megillah barehanded.

This position can also be implied from the comments of Rabbi Samuel Shtershon (Rashash) on *Megillah* 7a and *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 160 where he too indicates that it is possible that the opinion of Samuel is the one we accept.<sup>45</sup> Similar sentiments can be found in the works of other early *achronim* who use the position of Samuel as if it is a normative one in Jewish law.<sup>46</sup>

A contrary opinion is clearly adopted by Rabbi Avraham Ashvelli (*Magen Avraham*) in his commentary on *Orach Chaim* 147:1 where he states that the position of Samuel is not normative. The ruling of Magen Avraham is seconded by Rabbi Moshe Sofer (Chatam Sofer on *Orach Chaim* 691:1) who too disagrees with Rama's rule that no blank page is needed by stating that Esther was written with divine inspiration and to be written as well as read, is no different than any other book of *Ketuvim* and thus needs a blank page; indeed, in Rabbi Sofer's responsa he states this quite clearly. In *Orach Chaim* 163, he notes that while the position of Samuel on *Megillah* 7a is also found in the Jerusalem Talmud as the normative one, it is not accepted as normative by Jewish law. Rabbi Sofer admits that this position is contrary to Radvaz 2:771 and the conduct of his teacher (most likely Rabbi Nathan Adler) but notes that ruling contrary to Samuel is supported by the comments of Rabbi Jacob Emden, Responsa Yavetz 2:103, where, in fact, he rules contrary to Samuel.

Thus it is clear that there are three opinions advanced by the classical rabbinic scholars as to how to understand and resolve the dispute between Samuel, Rabbi Simon ben Mennasiah, Rabbi Meir, and Rabbi Yossi<sup>47</sup> on one hand, and the majority opinion on the other. Some authorities accept that the dispute is about membership of these books in the canon. These authorities rule that, of course, normative Judaism is not in harmony with Samuel, Rabbi Shimon ben Mennasiah, and any other authority who would remove a book from the twenty-four in the Bible.<sup>48</sup> Other scholars or commentators understand the dispute differently; they maintain that the dispute is not about membership in the canon but some other lesser disagreement as to whether these works—clearly members of the canon—defile the hands or not. Samuel and other Sages accept that there are some books in the Bible that do not defile the hands. Within the group of commentators and scholars who understand Samuel (and others) in this way, there is a secondary dispute. Does normative Jewish law accept the opinion of Samuel as correct that Esther does not defile the hands or is the opinion of those Talmudic Sages who deny any difference in status between these books and the other books in *Ketuvim* accepted. Rambam, Magen Avraham, Chatam Sofer, Yavetz, and others rule that the opinions of Samuel and his colleagues are rejected and there is no difference between these books and any other book of the *Writings*. Other authorities,

including apparently Rama, Mahari Weil, Panim Meior, and even Rashash and Radvaz accept that normative Jewish law is in accordance with the opinion of Samuel and his colleagues and rule that these works do not defile the hands.

#### **D. Differences between Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs and the Other Books in the Bible**

Essentially, those modern commentators who cite the Talmudic dispute as to defiling the hands to “prove” the late dating of the closing of the canon do so because it seems easy to argue that this dispute *must* be about membership in the canon, since nothing else, in their opinion, unites these three works with regard to the status of defiling the hands.<sup>49</sup> However, I would like to suggest a rationale for why the status of these three books—and no other<sup>50</sup>—might have been subject to disagreement as to whether they “defile the hands” but yet might be full and complete members of the Jewish Canon.

I argue that the crucial characteristic of these three works is the absence of the Tetragrammaton (שם המפורש) from the works themselves.<sup>51</sup> It is possible to argue that this fact is what led some Talmudic Sages, as well as some commentators, to rule that these works do not defile the hands (even though they are books of the Bible). *Simply put, there were some Sages who were less fearful of the religious consequences of either weasels eating the text of these scrolls or of their burning in a fire since they did not contain the holiest name of God (or in the case of Esther, any name of God) in the text.* It is that fact which led Radvaz to note that there is some diminution in the holiness of Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. Those Talmudic authorities who disagree would state that it is the general holiness of the work, and membership in the canon, even absent the Tetragrammaton, that makes the work identical to all other books of the Bible in terms of holiness and other ritual issues. A close review of defiling of the hands reveals that it is linked at least partially to the presence of God’s name in the text.<sup>52</sup> These three scrolls were thus treated—according to those who deny that they defiled the hands—like short verses in the bible that lacked God’s ultimate name.

It is through a clear understanding of the rules and rationale for *why* texts defile the hands that one can understand why one might doubt if Esther, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes defile the hands but are still members of the Biblical canon.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, part of this understanding of the difference between the names of God generally, and the Tetragrammaton (שם המפורש) in particular, can be understood in the context of saving scrolls from destruction. The *Shulchan Aruch* states that a properly written scroll containing Esther should be saved, but one that contains the text not

written in accordance with the technical rules of writing holy books should not be saved, since “it does not have any names of God.”<sup>54</sup> The fact that a similar statement is not made about the Song of Songs was also initially surprising, since, at first glance it too does not contain the name of God.<sup>55</sup> However, a review of the standard commentaries indicates that nearly all authorities accept that at least one of the “God-like” words found in Song of Songs is classified as one of the seven principal names of God and thus not erasable.<sup>56</sup>

## Conclusion

This article surveyed three issues: the rabbinic understanding of the dispute as to whether Esther, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes defile the hands; how that issue is resolved in Jewish law; and a possible rationale for the unique status of these three books. While at first glance it might appear that these three issues are unrelated, in fact they all revolve around a discussion of the special status of Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. Each of these works have their status discussed in the Talmud and each has various rabbinic authorities who question whether its status is similar to that of other books of the *Writings* since each of these lacks the presence of the Tetragrammaton (שם המפורש).

## NOTES

1. As with everything I write in the field of Bible and biblical rabbinics, an intellectual debt is owed to Dr. (Rabbi) Moshe Bernstein of Yeshiva College whose sagacity extends beyond his ability to explain the Sages.

As noted in the Introduction to this article, an enormous debt is owed to my friend and colleague, David Blumenthal, for his insights into the issues presented.

2. See material cited below in section B.

3. See Bava Kama 14a and below sections B and C.

4. S. Zeitlin, “An Historical Study of the Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures” PAAJR 3 (1931) 121, 132-133 cited in Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Archon, 1976) 113.

5. Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture* (Archon, 1976), 119-120.

6. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 135.

7. That is, if one held that these works did not defile the hands, did one also rule that they were not part of the canon? (The related question is what is meant when one states that a work is not written “with the spirit of the Divine” (ברוח הקדש).)

In his work on this topic, Dr. Leiman argues that the standard analysis of this topic by modern academic biblical scholars—which asserted that uncleanness of the hands and entry into the canon are one and the same—is incorrect, a misreading of the Jewish tradition, and that there was no dispute that these three books were included in the canon even by those who argue that they did not defile the hands. As explained further in this article, while that school of thought is present in the early commentaries, it is by no means the sole approach present; Dr. Leiman does not, in his truly insightful book on this topic, attempt to systemically survey the post-Talmudic early classical Jewish commentaries in this area, something which this article does attempt to do. Dr. Leiman’s conclusions, however, are strongly supported by the those sources cited in the second half of section B and section C of this article, since the presence of some sixteenth-through-

nineteenth Jewish law authorities who accept that Esther does not defile the hands as a normative rule, certainly does not prove that these same authorities did not have Esther in their canon. Rather it demonstrates that these authorities thought that the two statuses are unrelated. So too, this author's own analysis found in section D supports Dr. Leiman's position.

This article frequently follows the terminology of Dr. Leiman's work and thus, for example, uses the phrase "defiles the hands" to denote חמסן ידיים.

8. See generally, Rambam, Shear Avot Hatumah 9:3-5.

9. Shabbat 14a-b; See also Rabbi Ezeiel Landau, Nodah Beyehudah 1:7 who harmonizes these multiple decrees by positing that there were only two decrees. Such an approach is also adopted by Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein, Orach Chaim 147 and 691 and Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein, Aruch HaShulchan He'atid Shear Avot Hatumah 138:1-7 and might be the combined formulation of Rambam and Ravad on Shear Avot Hatumah 8:8.

10. Rabbi Joseph Karo, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 334:12-13.

11. For a discussion of what is the book of the Azara, see Dr. Leiman's *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, p. 104 and n. 496 where most authorities are cited as linking this to the temple scroll.

12. The mishnah continues, stating:

Rabbi Shimon states that Ecclesiastes is among the more lenient decisions of Beit Shammai and the strict ones of Beit Hillel. Rabbi Shimon Ben Azzai states "I heard a tradition from the seventy two elders that on the day that Rabbi Eliezer ben Azaria was appointed to the Yeshiva that Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes defile the hands."

13. The Talmud continues, stating:

They stated to Rabbi Shimon ben Mennassiah "Is this not all: Does it not state (Kings 1:4) and "he spoke 3000 parables" and (Prov. 30:6) "Add not to his words." . . . Come and listen: "Do not add to his words." Rabbi Eliezer states Esther was written with divine inspiration as it says Haman said in his heart; Rabbi Akiva states: Esther was written with divine inspiration as it says "Esther found favor in all who saw her"; Rabbi Meir states Esther was written with divine inspiration as it says "and the matter was known to Mordecai"; Rabbi Yossie ben Dormaskit states Esther was written with divine inspiration as it states "in the booty they did not take." Samuel says if your analysis were correct I could give a better proof, since it says "they kept and accepted"—they kept in heaven that which they accepted below. Rava states that each of these proofs can be refuted except for Samuel's, which cannot be refuted.

14. See Kelayim 15:6, Sotah 18a, Yadayim 4:5.

15. Tosephta Yadayim 2:13.

16. Tosephta 2:13; that the word "gilyonim" means gospels is noted by Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, n.511 where other possibilities are suggested.

17. Mishnah Pesachim 10:9.

18. "כרי הקדש" designates all of Scripture. In some amoraic texts it designates the Hagiography (J. Shabath 15b,c)." Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 57 and note n.281.

19. The correctness of the statement "even with washed hands" is quite critical for a different issue. If this is correct, it is prohibited to directly touch even a megillah scroll after washing one's hands. Normative Jewish law declines to follow this statement, and accepts that after washing the hands one may touch scrolls of Prophets and Ketuvim, but not Torah; see Rabbi Israel Meir Kagin, *Biur Halacha* O.C. 147 "tov."

20. Rabbi Yom Tov Ashbelli (Ritva) Megillah 7a,

21. B. Levin, Oztar Hagaonim, Megillah 7a.

22. Rabbi Menachem ben Meir, commenting on Megillah 7a.

23. Tosaphot Rabbi Asher Megillah 7a "and not uttered to be written" and Yoma 29a; See also comments of Pnei Yehoshua Megillah 7a "thus it appears to me to explain."

24. Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet, Megillah 7a "Given to be read and not to be written." See also comments of Rabbi Moshe Schreiber, Chatam Sofer on Megillah 7a "Rabbi Eliezer states."



25. Commenting on Yoma 29a.

26. As it states on Megillah 19a-b.

27. See sources cited in notes 16, 19, and 20 who note this fact. The comments by Rashba and Rosh which indicate that megillah is to be written down even according to Samuel based on a rabbinic decree shed light on how they understood this opinion. Samuel ruled that Esther is a part of the Purim liturgy which must be recited. It is not, however, part of the holy written canon. Samuel, however, acknowledges that since it is to be liturgically recited, it must be written down based on a rabbinic decree that compels one to read from a text that which is recited. Those who disagree with Samuel rule that the text must be written down because the written canon may not be recited by heart according to biblical rule; see sources cited in note 37.

28. And many other places, see Leiman, pp. 96-97.

29. But see Leiman, p. 113.

30. This opinion cannot be found explicitly in the commentaries, but it flows logically from their commentary on Samuel's opinion (if Samuel, who acknowledges the divine inspiration of Esther, nonetheless maintains that it is not part of the canon, Rabbi Shimon ben Mennassiah, who rules that Ecclesiastes is not divinely inspired, certainly rules it not part of the canon).

31. See e.g., Megillah 11a, 13a, and 15a.

32. But see Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Archon, 1976), 113-114, n. 531-532.

33. Checked by Computer search on Bar-Ilan and Davka CD-Rom.

34. See Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Archon, 1976), pp. 113-116.

35. Sefer Haeshkol, Albeck edition, pp. 153-154.

36. This explanation of Rambam's opinion would explain why the *Ain Mishpat* indicates (on Megillah 7a) that Rambam does accept the opinion of Rabbi Shimon ben Mennassah as correct. Rabbi Shimon says two things: (1) Song of Songs was not written with divine inspiration; and (2) thus it does not defile the hands. Rambam rejects the second of these two statements as legally incorrect. He does, however, accept the first of them as factually correct. This has nothing to do with whether these books are, or are not, in the canon. This analysis supports the opinion of Dr. Leiman that the debate over defiling the hands has nothing to do with being in the canon. Indeed, all of the latter authorities quoted in this article support that thesis. It is inconceivable that these latter authorities who accept the opinion of Samuel as correct or tenably correct do so by removing it from the Bible; see also Rabbi Y. M. Epstein, *Aruch HaShulchan He'atid Shear Avot Hatumah* 141:10 discusses the problematic formulation of Rambam without providing any answer.

37. *Shear Avot Hatumah* 9:5. Chazon Nachum, commenting on Yadayim 3:6 has a different text of Rambam. He states that Rambam says "even Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, which are the words of Solomon." Responsa Kol Mevasser 2:43 notes that this is simply a mistake.

38. This can be implied as well from the comments of Rabbi Shimon MeShantz on Yadayim 3:5 where he asserts that the reversal of names between the Yadayim 3:5 and Megillah 7a reflects a substantive disagreement; this approach is agreed to by Tosaphot Yom Tov commenting on Yadayim 3:5 who additionally cites others who accept this distinction. Were he to hold that this dispute is about membership in the canon such an explanation would be untenable. See also Responsa Tashbetz 1:5 who seems to adopt this line of reasoning and asserts that the halacha is not in harmony with Samuel and that even Samuel accepts that Esther is in the canon.

39. They are not present for Esther, as the one authority who denies that Esther defiles the hands clearly agrees that the work was divinely inspired. For the book of Esther, on the other hand, certain very practical distinctions are present; see section B.

40. This is clearly stated in Tosefta Yadayim 2:14 where Rabbi Shimon ben Mennassiah states that he rules that Song of Songs does defile the hands, as it was written with divine inspiration, whereas he rules Ecclesiastes is not as it was not written with divine inspiration.

41. Radvaz, Responsa 2:722. The approach of Radvaz is by no means the only one to this issue. Responsa Rabbi Joseph Chaim, Rav Peelim 4:11 also addresses this issue, although he approaches it from a classical midrashic perspective. He states:

On your second question concerning why *Esther* does not contain the name of God. This question is found in the works of the Sages and is quoted in Midrash Eliyahu of Mahra Hacohein 55:4 who states the reason the name of God is not found in the book of Esther was to indicate that God's hand was hidden at the time of Haman as it says "I will hide my face." Thus the name of God was hidden and not written in Esther. . . . Your question of why the name of God is not found in the *Song of Songs* is discussed by the Sages in Shevuot 35 where they state that every Solomon found in Song of Songs is holy except for the one "thousands are to Solomon." Such is also found in Rambam Yesodei HaTorah 6:8. It is stated by Rabbi Karo in Kesef Mishnah there that all of the Solomons are not really holy like the names of God that cannot be erased, but only that one who swears by the name Solomon has sworn in the name of God. . . . The reason that the name of God is only mentioned in a hinted manner in the name of Solomon "the one who peace is his name," and God's name is not mentioned clearly is because Song of Songs, from beginning to end is a parable, containing matters which are hidden and secret and are not simple. . . . Your question as to why Ecclesiastes does not contain the Tetragrammaton and only the name Elokeim is because the work deals with the confusions of this world and the final destiny of man. Thus it only uses the name elokim in this context which is the name of God for complete justice and the judge of law and justice. . . .

42. Rabbi Joseph Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 691:2; see also Rabbi Joseph Karo, Beit Yosef Orach Chaim 691.

43. Glosses of Rama on O.C. 691:12. Rabbi David Halevi, writing in *Tura Zahav* suggest a different manner of justifying the custom. His suggestion, however, is very difficult as given two varied opinions within the rishonim it is difficult to accept as normative an approach which says halacha rejects both of them.

44. Mantles were covering designed to allow one to handle the scroll without defiling ones hands. A scroll that does not need a mantle, does not defile the hands.

This author would add additionally that it appears from the analytic give and take of Yoma 29a that the Talmud was not prepared to accept an answer incompatible with Samuel's opinion, which is an indication that his opinion might be normative.

45. Rabbi Samuel Shtershon's, Rashash, notes are very cryptic, and difficult to understand. He is perhaps understood by the notes in Albeck's Eshkol in this manner; Sefat Emet commenting on Megilah 7a also indicates that perhaps the law is like Samuel.

46. See generally Rabbi Jacob Beirav, Responsa Mahari bei Rav 34 (quoted completely by Rabbi Solomon ben Avraham Hacohein, Responsa Maharshach 2:215) and Rabbi Yom Tov ben Moshe Tzahalon, MahariTatz 1:115 who discuss the opinion of Samuel in a manner which might indicate that it is accepted as normative. It is possible to derive this opinion as well from the combined insights of Responsa Radvaz 2:771 and 2:722 (quoted above) where he uses language which indicates that this might be his opinion. Radvaz 2:771 states in part:

You asked my opinion whether the rabbinic decree that sacred texts defile the hands applies to the oral law, like *mishnayot*:

Response: Oral law does not defile the hands. You should know that there is a dispute whether all sacred works defile the hands; but it was learned and established that even Ecclesiastes and Esther are in that group [*note: Song of Songs is not mentioned—mb*]. That authority who held that Esther did not defile the hands asserted this because it was written to be read and not to be written. We see from this that any item which was not given to be written does not defile the hands. The oral law was not given to be written as it says "on the bases [lit: through the mouth]" words that are verbally transmitted are not supposed to be written down. Only because of "a time came for G-d" they permitted the writing of mishnayot and halachot; however, since according to the law they were not given to be

written, they do not defile the hands and it is permissible to touch them uncovered.

On the other hand responsa 2:771 contains language which indicates that his conclusion could be different. Chatam Sofer commenting on Orach Chaim 691 indicates that Radvaz agreed with Rama's ruling.

This author would assert that the omission of Song of Songs from this responsa in the list of works which defile the hands, in combination with his treatment of it in responsa 2:722, would indicate that he accepted the classification of it as not defiling the hands (and not written with divine inspiration). Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that Maimonides accepts that *both* Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes are the wisdom of Solomon as that assertion is not found in Talmudic literature in regards to Song of Songs. (Rabbi Yossi in Yadayim 4:6 does assert that it might not defile the hands, but does not give a reason.) Indeed, Maimonides' acceptance of both opinions, even though Rabbi Shimon ben Mennassiah himself accepts that the Song of Songs does defile the hands (see Tosefta Yadayim 2:14) most likely is based on the facts discussed by this article in section C.

For a general discussion of the status of Song of Songs in Judaism, see Rabbi Meshulam Roth, Responsa Kol Mevasser 2:43. In that responsa some parity between Esther, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes is assumed, but not demonstrated. A strong claim can be made that the status of Esther is different from each of these other works, as even Samuel admits that it was written with divine inspiration; the problematic formulation with regards to the Song of Songs is noted in Aruch HaShulchan He'atid, Shear Avot Hatumah 141:10.

47. Each of these authorities states that one of these books does not defile the hands. Of course, they themselves disagree as to which of the books have that status.

48. Indeed, one is nearly compelled in that direction as the listing of books in the canon found in Bava Kama 14a cites no disputing opinion as to membership in the canon.

49. See I. H. Eybers, Historical Evidence on the Canon of the Old Testament with Special Reference to the Qumran Sect, 29 as cited in Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Archon, 1976), 111 and S. Zeitlin, "An Historical Study of the Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures" PAAJR 3 (1931), 132-133.

50. While it is true that Megillah 7a also affirms that Ruth defiles the hands, one finds no dissenting opinion to that fact in the rabbinic literature. While Leiman (Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Archon, 1976), n.504) infers that there must have been some dispute as to its status also, one could easily reply that that dispute was with the Christian elements and not found within the rabbinic circles. Indeed, there are early Christian sources which deny the canonization of Ruth; see Leiman, 41-50.

51. Esther contains no explicit mention of God; Song of Songs contains no clear unambiguous references to God's name except the word Solomon which the Talmud states is a nickname for God in this context and the references listed in note ; Ecclesiastes contains only the name elokim. All other books of the Bible contain the Tetragrammaton. This fact was first noted by Radvaz and Rav Peilim, as discussed above, and was pointed out to the author by his colleague Dr. David Blumenthal in a discussion of Dr. Blumenthal's piece.

The crucial difference between these three works themselves is that Esther contains no mention of God's name in any of its un-erasable forms, whereas Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs do.

52. See the example given in Tosefta Yadayim Chapter 2 where it states clearly that a complete short verse which does not contain God's name does not defile the hands, and the related material concerning saving sacred texts from burning in Shabbat 115-118 and Rabbi Joseph Karo, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 334.

53. It is worth noting that this distinction would explain Maimonides' assertion that Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes are "the wisdom of Solomon" (a phrase which indicates that they are not written with complete divine inspiration). They remain in the canon and they even defile the hands according to Maimonides; but nonetheless, their status is different from the other works in the Bible as they are lacking the ultimate name of God.

54. Rabbi Joseph Karo, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 334:12-13; see also Hagoat Mayoniout Shabbat 23:27 (n.23).

55. See Yesodai Hatorah 6:9 where Rambam clearly rules that the word "Solomon" in Song of Songs is *not* a name of God, but rather only as other as other descriptions of God, like *rachamin*; this is affirmed by Rabbi Karo (*Kesef Mishnah*) in the name of numerous other authorities.

56. See Song of Songs 2:7, 3:5, 8:6 and commentaries of Rashi, Nachmanides, Ibn Ezra, and others. Indeed, the standard masoretic works clearly list the reference in Song of Songs 8:6 as holy; see David Ginsburg, *The Masorah* III:196; but see Minchat Shai commenting on Song of Songs 8:6 who notes that this is in dispute between the Ben-Asher and the Ben-Naphtali texts. There are two different issues present in this discussion: whether the words refer by reference to God and whether they are words that cannot be erased as they are a name of God. It is unclear which is needed to be classified as "saving from a fire" as Esther contains neither. Only *Metzudat David/Tzion* lists all of them as not even referring to God.

**Moving?**

**Please print your correct name and address and  
enclose your address label from JUDAISM**

**Allow 6 weeks to effect change.**

**Mail to: JUDAISM, 15 East 84th St, New York, NY 10028-0458**

# WHERE GOD IS NOT: THE BOOK OF ESTHER AND SONG OF SONGS

DAVID R. BLUMENTHAL

But that which is edifying is so only because it already conforms . . . the plain sense is always dependent on the understanding of larger wholes and on changing custom and authority. . . .<sup>2</sup>

## The Teaching that Wasn't There

THE NAME OF GOD, IN ALL ITS VARIATIONS, DOES NOT occur in the Book of Esther. This strange phenomenon was discerned, and corrected, very early. Already the Septuagint, the Targumim, and the apocryphal Book of Esther inserted one or more of the names of God into the text.<sup>3</sup> This lacuna was also recognized by the rabbis of the Talmud who, in seeking adumbrations in the Torah for the characters in the Book of Esther, asked: "Where does one find an allusion to Esther in the Torah? In the verse, 'I [God] shall surely hide (Hebrew, *haster 'astir*) My Face from them.'<sup>4</sup> The liturgy, too, sensed that God is the ever-present, but hidden, force behind the events of history when it introduced each of the first three paragraphs of the special insertions into the third blessing of the Amidah for the High Holidays with the same word that introduces Esther's approach to Ahasuerus, "And so [I shall go into the presence of the king]" (Heb., *u-ve-khen*).<sup>5</sup>

Among the medieval commentators, too, the absence of the name of God from the text of the Book of Esther was remarked, most clearly by Ibn Ezra. He rejected the allusion to the name of God in Esther 4:14 ("from another Place" [Heb., *maqom*]) because the use of *maqom* to denote God is rabbinic and not biblical style. Ibn Ezra offered instead the suggestion that the name of God was repressed from the text by its authors so that, when the Megilla was read by the non-Jews of Ahasuerus' kingdom, they would not substitute the names of their own gods, thereby completely distorting the event theologically.<sup>6</sup>

Modern commentators have also noted this anomaly and offered various explanations. One of the clearer explanations is that of Yehezkel

---

DAVID R. BLUMENTHAL is the Jay and Leslie Cohen Professor of Judaic Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. His many books and essays include studies of modern, medieval, and classic Jewish themes, texts, and thinkers. He is just completing *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest*.

Kaufmann, adopted by Hacham: that God is the real King behind the weak and ineffective king, Ahasuerus.<sup>7</sup>

This history is summarized in the statement by Hacham: “And this is the *only* book in the *entire* Bible in which the name of God is not mentioned [Emphasis added].”<sup>8</sup> The same type of statement is made by Nosson Scherman, the general editor of the Artscroll series: “G-d’s [sic] Name does not appear in the *Megillah*—the *only one* of the twenty-four sacred books where such a phenomenon occurs [Emphasis added].”<sup>9</sup> What is strange about these two statements, and others like them, is that they are *just not true*.

Maimonides, summarizing rabbinic teaching, lists seven names of God: YHVH with ‘Adonai, ‘El, ‘Elohah, ‘Elohim, ‘Elohei, Shaddai, and Tseva’ot and rules that these names, once written, may not be erased.<sup>10</sup> These names (Heb., *shem*) are differentiated from other descriptive terms (Heb., *kinnui*) used of God in that the former cannot be erased once written.<sup>11</sup> All seven names have equal status in this regard. However, with the aid of CD-ROM searches, it is easy to establish that YHVH-‘Adonai and ‘Elohim-‘Elohah-‘Elohei are overwhelmingly the most common names of God.<sup>12</sup> In addition, there may also be theological grounds for favoring these names. Maimonides formulates rabbinic thought in noting that the Tetragrammaton is the proper name of God; it has no meaning as a noun.<sup>13</sup> He also shows that ‘Elohim is a word with many meanings; it serves as the word-name that conveys agency, the power to act. ‘Elohim thus includes all those divine and created forces through which God’s providence works. It is also the term used to describe God when God appears to non-Jewish prophets.<sup>14</sup> Both names are, thus, special theologically and statistically, though halakhically they have the same status as the other names. Now, the Tetragrammaton appears in all the books of the Bible except Song of Songs, Esther, and Ecclesiastes.<sup>15</sup> The name ‘Elohim, in its various forms, appears in all books except Ovadiah, Lamentations, Song of Songs, and Esther (it appears 36 times in Ecclesiastes). Adding these two most common names of God together, the simple statistic emerges: *Neither of the two most common names of God occurs either in Esther or in Song of Songs, though at least one or the other appears in every other book of the Bible.*

There are two additional words that could be construed as names of God: *shalhevetyah* (Song 8:6) and *bi-tseva’ot* (Song 2:7; 3:5). As noted, the Talmud understands *tseva’ot* as one of the names of God which, when written, cannot be erased.<sup>16</sup> This may be due to the fact that *tseva’ot* / *tsiv’ot* / *ha-tseva’ot* occurs 292 times in the Bible (excluding the two occurrences in Song of Songs) and, in all but five cases (Dt. 20:9; I Kings 2:5; Jer. 3:19; Ps. 68:13; and I Chron. 27:3), it is linked with either the Tetragrammaton or with some form of ‘Elohim. This accounts, in part, for the rabbinic opinion

that the name of God does occur in Song of Songs. Accordingly, the Targum renders Song 2:7 and 3:5, “Lord of hosts”; however, all the commentators to Song of Songs that I have seen interpret *bi-tseva’ot* as “gazelles,” understanding it as the female form of *tsvi*.<sup>17</sup> As such, these two words are not holy but secular; that is, they are not considered names of God but words, like other secular occurrences of *tseva’ot*.<sup>18</sup>

The word *shalhevetyah* can be read as one or two words. If it is one word, then, one must translate it as “a great fire”; if it is read as two words, one must translate it as “fire of Yah [God].” In the latter case, one could argue that Yah, as a partial rendering of YHVH, is a name of God (though not explicitly listed by Maimonides or the Talmud) and God’s name then does appear in Song of Songs; in the former case, *shalhevetyah* is a normal word and not a name of God. The *Minhat Shai* (*ad loc*) and C. D. Ginsburg, *The Massorah*,<sup>19</sup> note that the main massoretic manuscripts of the Bible differ on how to read this word, with Ben Asher reading it as one word because the *taf* has a *sheva* and the *hey* does not have a *mapik*. This makes *shalhevetyah* similar to *ma’felyah* (Jer. 2:31), which all massoretic manuscripts read as one word.<sup>20</sup> The commentators, too, are divided: Ibn Ezra opts for the two-word reading and renders, “a fire of God.” *Metsudat Zion* / *Metsudat David*, Radak, and *Minhat Shai* do not read it as two words and hence do not take it as a name of God; they render, “a great fire,” “a fire that burns powerfully.” Rashi reads, “the fire of Gehinnom.”<sup>21</sup> There is, thus, ample precedent to regard both *bi-tseva’ot* and *shalhevetyah* as not being names of God.

I first saw the statement that the name of God does not appear in Song of Songs in Renita Weems’ article on Song of Songs in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*.<sup>22</sup> I confess that, at first, I did not believe it. When I consulted other male colleagues with a traditional Jewish education, they too were skeptical. Yet, the facts are as Weems says: None of the seven names of God appears in Song of Songs.

Why did I not know that the name of God does not appear in Song of Songs? Why did Hacham, an otherwise impeccable biblical scholar, not know it? Why did my Jewish male friends and colleagues not know it? More importantly, why does the rabbinic tradition to which we are heir—an otherwise very learned and text-conscious tradition—not actively teach that neither of the two most common names of God appears in Song of Songs although the tradition does actively teach that neither of the two most common names of God appears in the Book of Esther?<sup>23</sup>

### The Book that Wasn’t There

The anomaly of a sexually explicit, erotic text in an otherwise very restrained, austere canon was recognized very early by rabbinic tradi-



tion. The Targum understood the text of Song of Songs symbolically.<sup>24</sup> The various midrashim, too, followed a symbolic line of interpretation. The Mishna also discussed the status of Song of Songs, ending with the dictum of Akiva: "Far be this from being so; no person in Israel disagrees [with the principle] that Song of Songs is considered holy [lit., renders the hands of one who touches such a scroll impure] for, the whole world was never so meritorious as on the day that Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Scriptures are holy, but Song of Songs is the holiest of the holy. . . ."<sup>25</sup> The Talmud, too, dealt with this matter. While listing the names of God and various substitutes which are considered so holy that they may not be erased, the Talmud comments: "Every 'Solomon' in Song of Songs is holy; it is a song to Him Who is the possessor of peace, except . . . [which refers to King Solomon]."<sup>26</sup> The point is that every occurrence of the name of 'Solomon' in Song of Songs is holy because it is really a name of God. The earliest rabbinic traditions, then, clearly understood Song of Songs as a love poem between God and the Jewish people, not as an erotic description of human love; they, therefore, deemed it holy, surrounded it with ritual protective behavior, and read the name of God back into the text.<sup>27</sup>

The medieval tradition followed suit. Rashi largely ignored the "simple" meaning and claimed that Song of Songs was written under the influence of the holy spirit and is a love song between God and the Jewish people in which the people are portrayed as a widow yearning for her husband.<sup>28</sup> Ibn Ezra knew of and explicated both the sexually explicit and the spiritualized understandings of the text; however, he stated unambiguously: "Far be it from being so that Song of Songs is about matters of passion; rather, it is written as an extended metaphor (Heb., *mashal*)."<sup>29</sup> Some of the medieval commentators, primary among them Maimonides, understood Song of Songs as an extended metaphor for the love of the individual pious soul for God, a position known to, but rejected by, Ibn Ezra.<sup>30</sup> On the matter of not erasing the word "Solomon," Maimonides codified the law as such.<sup>31</sup> The commentators, however, point out that, actually, one *may* erase that word. They go on to specify that Maimonides' codification of the law about not erasing the word "Solomon" had other purposes: so that scholars should know that the word "Solomon" is really a name of God in the sense that, if one administers an oath using the word "Solomon" and the person then violates that oath, such a person is culpable under the law because "Solomon" is a name of God; further, that even "Solomon" may not be erased if it is written in the context of Song of Songs.<sup>32</sup> It is clear, then, that the medieval tradition followed the earlier rabbinic tradition in regarding Song of Songs as an extended metaphor of the love between God and the Jewish people (and, in certain mystical and

philosophic circles, as an extended metaphor for the love of the individual pious soul and God), not as an erotic description of human love; they too, therefore, deemed it holy, surrounded it with ritual protective behavior, and read the name of God back into the text.

Contemporary orthodox commentators have followed the strict sense of this tradition; hence, the statement by Scherman:

Song of Songs is surely a song of love, but not of one human's love for another. Our Sages and the commentators did not doubt for an instant that the only *simple* meaning is the allegorical one. . . . When the commentators say that *your bosom[s]* refer[s] to Moses and Aaron, they are not departing from the simple literal meaning of the phrase in the least. Song of Songs uses words in their ultimate connotations.<sup>33</sup>

Scherman, thus, deals with the sexually explicit and erotic by denying it, doing so more bluntly than Ibn Ezra but not straying too far from a significant line of interpretation in rabbinic Judaism. Following this path, one can respond that the rabbinic tradition (and I) did not know that the name of God does not occur in Song of Songs because it did not admit that Song of Songs is what it is—a collection of sexually explicit love poems. Centuries, indeed millenia, have been devoted to reading this text as the extended metaphor *par excellence* of the love of God and Israel and, in certain circles, of the love of the pious soul and God; God's name is woven into the text at every step, in midrash and in exegesis. For the tradition the simple meaning *is* the allegorical meaning, as Scherman represents.

Contemporary nonorthodox scholars have generally acknowledged that there are two levels of meaning, the simple and the allegorical, relying on standard literary critical methods and on Ibn Ezra's second method of interpretation.<sup>34</sup> Most of these scholars, however, do not deal with the question of why the name of God is not mentioned in Song of Songs.<sup>35</sup> Gordis at least offers a theory:

The deepseated reluctance to use the Divine name, which finds expression in the Third Commandment (Ex. 20:7), became increasingly felt with time. . . . The desire to avoid mentioning God's name would be particularly strongly felt in connection with an oath [Song 2:7; 3:5] concerned with the physical aspects of love. . . . In this reticence with regard to the use of the Divine name, particularly in the context of sensual love, as well as in its pervasive delicacy of expression. . . . Song reveals itself as authentically within the Jewish tradition.<sup>36</sup>

Both the contemporary orthodox and nonorthodox Jewish interpretations, however, raise serious questions about what Kermode called "the plain sense of things" and "the understanding of larger wholes."

Concerning the orthodox approach, one must raise several issues: (1) The opposition to Akiva's view<sup>37</sup> implies that at least some rabbinic

sages understood that the simple meaning was not the allegorical meaning. Their objection to the status of Song of Songs is precisely because it is what it is: an anthology of erotic poetry which is out of place in sacred canon. In debating the sacredness of Song of Songs, they acknowledged its status (legitimate, to some, and “illegitimate,” to others) as a plain, nonallegorized text.

(2) One can understand the targumic and midrashic reading of Song of Songs and the Akivan and talmudic view which reads every “Solomon” as a name of God as part of the allegorization process of Song of Songs. Making every “Solomon” a name of God valorized the allegorical approach even as it reflected and embodied it; so did the verse-by-verse midrash of the earlier and later rabbinic sources. However this, too, implies a conscious effort by the authorities to interpret Song of Songs into theological acceptability, an effort intended to facilitate its reading by the religious community. This, in turn, implies its logically prior status as a plain, nonallegorized text.

(3) Particularly as formulated by Scherman, the contemporary orthodox interpretation forces the triumph of dogma over common sense, for the cognitive dissonance produced by the erotic text and its spiritual context leads to ambiguity, to a theory of double meaning. Willy nilly, the text was, and is, read on two levels: the physical and the spiritual, even if the latter is dogmatically the only correct way to understand the text. Put differently, even those sages, who for theological purposes read the allegorical meaning of Song of Songs as the simple meaning, were caught up in the process of “performative reading,” that is, they were doing a “simultaneous translation” of the simple into the allegorical meaning. While asserting only the latter as meaningful on dogmatic grounds, they must have recognized the former on some cognitive level. One can read “breasts” and understand “Moses and Aaron,” but not before understanding “breasts” and then “translating” into the allegory.<sup>39</sup> The interpretation of contemporary orthodoxy which asserts that there is no simple meaning is dangerous because denial of the physical and rejection of the literal undermines the allegorical, for allegory is based on an underlying commonsense reading which it “allegorizes.” This approach blurs the distinction, carefully preserved by the rabbis, between *mashal* and *nimshal*.<sup>40</sup> Better to assert a text with commentary than to deny the text and assert only the commentary.

(4) In any case, one must ask why the absence of the name of God was publicly noted by the tradition in the Book of Esther but was not so noted in Song of Songs since both were canonical and both were “corrected” by the early tradition.

The contemporary nonorthodox Jewish approach poses two even more difficult questions: First, insofar as it is silent, the nonorthodox

approach indicates that something is being covered up. Silence is either reverent or protective. The fact that the name of God is absent from an explicitly sexual document should be enough to alert modern readers that something is amiss. The fact that the name of God is absent from a document dealing with the physical love between man and woman, a topic long taboo in modern society, should be enough to warn us that contemporary analysis is hiding something. Second, with no prior ideological commitment to concealing the sexually explicit meaning, why would many nonorthodox scholars be unaware of the fact that the name of God does not appear in Song of Songs even though they are aware that it does not appear in the Book of Esther? With no prior religious commitment to the allegorical reading, what interpretive stance accounts for blindness to a simple lexical fact? Gordis' suggestion seems lame and inadequate; invoking the Third Commandment and traditional reticence only reinforces the sense that something is being hidden.

Another look at the sources is indicated:

### **The Sub-Text: A Story of Heroism**

In the standard rabbinic editions of the Bible, there is a commentary to Song of Songs by the Rabbi of Lissa entitled, *Tsrer ha-Mor*.<sup>40</sup> The introduction there deals with the issue of the appropriateness of such a book for the biblical canon but in a different context:

... that the Sages, may their memory be a blessing, said: "A man and a woman—[if they are worthy] the Shekhina is between them" [*Talmud*, Sota 17a]. [This is true] even when said in the situation in which they do physical acts, i.e., that [when they do such acts,] it is as if a demon has compelled them; there is [really] no physical appetite. [This is the case of] Palti ben Layish who was in the same bed with a woman and did not touch her. . . .<sup>41</sup>

The reference to Palti ben Layish is to I Sam. 25:44, taken together with II Sam. 3:15. The story, briefly, is that Saul had given his daughter, Michal, to David as a wife. Saul, subsequently, took her from David and gave her to Palti ben Layish. When David became king, he reclaimed Michal from Palti, whose name had been changed to Paltiel, that is, the name of God ['El] had been added to it. The rabbis understood that Palti, although living with Michal and even sleeping in the same bed with her, did not touch her because she was the wife of David and, for this reason, Palti merited having the name of God ['El] added to his own name.

The roots of this tradition are found in three forms:

The rabbis taught: Three men swore their sexual appetites [to abstinence] and were saved from sexual sin: Joseph, as it is written, "And he refused [the

advances of the wife of Potiphar]" (Gen. 39:8); Boaz, as it is written, "By the life of the Lord, sleep until the morning" (Ruth 3:13)—this teaches that he took his sexual organ and put it at the edge of the grave [sic] and swore his sexual appetite not to do anything; and Palti ben Layish . . . and when he saw [that he had a desire for Michal] he swore his appetite not to touch her and put a sword on the bed between him and her to break his appetite."<sup>42</sup>

Rabbi Shim'on ben Gamliel said: Three persons fled from sin and the Holy One, blessed be He, added His Name to theirs: Joseph, Palti, and Ya'el. . . . And in the end, his name is Paltiel. . . . 'El [God] testified about him that he did not touch her. . . . [And] the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "My Name testifies about Ya'el that Sisra did not touch her."<sup>43</sup>

What we have here is the definition of the sexual hero in rabbinic Judaism. Joseph, Boaz, and Paltiel resisted their sexual impulses, even using an oath to do so. For Joseph to have spent several hours, for Boaz to have spent a whole night, and for Palti to have spent several years in situations of great sexual temptation and to have resisted is highly praiseworthy.

This, in turn, leads to the valorization of resistance to all one's appetites—in nonsexual, as well as in sexual, contexts:

From this [the way Joseph refused Potiphar's wife] we learn that the righteous swear their appetites [to abstinence], as Rabbi Josiah taught: "These words shall be upon your heart" [Dt. 6:6]—from here we learn that a man *should* swear his appetite [to abstinence]. In connection with Abraham, it says . . . with Boaz . . . with David . . . with Elisha. . . . And just as the righteous swear their appetites not to act, so the wicked swear their appetites to act. . . . [emphasis added]."<sup>44</sup>

This motif of sexual heroism needs to be examined more carefully, for mastery over sexual appetite through abstinence is a form of heroism only in a thoroughly patriarchal universe. Retention of seed is an expression of individuation and personal strength only in an unremittingly masculine worldview. Furthermore, an integral part of this mastery-heroism is denial—denial of the power of sexuality, refusal of the overwhelming desire for woman. To deny woman is to master appetite; or more properly: to reject the need for woman and to retain seed is to be one's masterly, masculine self.<sup>45</sup>

Particularly interesting in this connection is the text referring to Ya'el:

From whence do we learn [that God added God's name to Ya'el because she resisted sexual temptation]? When Sisra fled to Ya'el, the wife of Hever the Kenite, she said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside" [Ju. 4:18]. He, then, said to her, "Give me a little water" and she opened a skin of milk and gave him to drink. His appetite burned within him, blazing for sexual activity. What did she do? She came to him on the sly and struck the tent-peg into his

temple [so that he died] and “she covered him with a blanket” [*ibid.*, Heb., *bi-semikha*]. What does “with a blanket” mean? . . . Resh Lakish said, “We have searched all of Scriptures and we have not found a device [connected with killing] called ‘blanket.’ What, then, is *semikha*? It is written with a *sin* [the Hebrew letter for “s” which looks like the Hebrew letter for “sh”]. Hence, [the word *semikha*] should be read *shemi + ko*, ‘My Name is here,’ for My Name testifies about Ya’el that Sisra did not touch her.”<sup>46</sup>

The context speaks about men who fled from sin and had the divine appellative added to their names, easily demonstrated by Joseph (called “Jehoseph” is Ps. 81:6) and Palti (called “Paltiel”). Ya’el is a problem on two counts: First, the appellative is not added to her name but derived from the “device” connected with the killing of Sisra, the “blanket” (Hebrew, *semikha*, read as *shemi + ko*). Second, Ya’el is a woman. She is not fleeing sexual temptation; she is avoiding rape. The murder she commits, in this midrashic version of the story, is as much an act of self-defense as it is a political-military act. The sexual roles have been reversed.<sup>47</sup>

An alternate version of the Ya’el-Sisra story is contained in the *Talmud* (Horayot 10b, with a parallel in Nazir 23b):

Rabbi Nahman bar Yitshak said: “A sin committed for the sake [of heaven] is greater than a mitsva performed not for the sake [of heaven], as it says, ‘May Ya’el, the wife of Hever the Kenite, be more blessed than women; may she be blessed more than women in the tent’ [Ju. 5:24].” Who are the ‘women in the tent’? Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. . . . Rabbi Yohanan said, “That wicked man [Sisra] had intercourse [with Ya’el] seven times at that time, as it says, ‘He prostrated himself between her legs, he fell, he lay down; between her legs he prostrated himself and fell; where he prostrated himself there he fell stricken’ [Ju. 5:27].”<sup>48</sup> But did she not feel pleasure at this sin? Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Shim’on bar Yohai, “Even the good deeds of the wicked are evil for the righteous.”<sup>49</sup>

Here, too, the story of Ya’el is problematic because she is not fleeing sexual temptation but is piously using her sexual powers to do God’s will and save Israel and, with Rashi, she even suffers for it by having to bear the filth of Sisra.

Reflecting in the light of the rabbinic definition of sexual heroism, one must, then, note that the tradition in which I and my male colleagues were educated is very much a part of the patriarchal worldview that defined and exalted sexual abstinence and denial as a form of heroism, as the texts show. This, in turn, yields the insight that the tradition did not—indeed could not—“see” that the name of God is absent in Song of Songs, even though it “saw” that fact in connection with the Book of Esther where the sexual valences are much weaker. Rather, the tradition denied the sexuality of Song of Songs and interpreted the book as an allegory. It denied the deep need to repen(e)-trate the womb and interpreted the book as an allegory of the love

of God and the people or, in certain circles, of the love of the pious soul and God. In its modern form, the tradition has even gone so far as to deny that there exists a simple, physical meaning in the text while, in its secular form, it has gone so far as not to "see" the facts at all, or to offer lame excuses. Where God is not, is as much a function of the reader as it is of the text. As Boyarin has noted, "... the text is always made up of a mosaic of conscious and unconscious citation of earlier discourse ... there are cultural codes, again either conscious or unconscious, which both constrain and allow the production of new texts. ..."<sup>50</sup>

The converse is also true: to recover the text is to recover sexuality, and to recover womb-envy is to recover the text. It is one of the accomplishments of feminist criticism to have raised these questions.

**Tabulation of the Divine Names<sup>51</sup>**

Name	Alone	Prefix <sup>52</sup>	Suffix <sup>53</sup>	Suffix-Prefix <sup>54</sup>	Total
YHVH <sup>55</sup>	6008	675			6683
'Adonai					230 <sup>56</sup>
'El					335 <sup>57</sup>
'Elohah	49	5	3		57
'Elohim <sup>58</sup>	680	482			1162
'Elohei/ai	502	46	796 <sup>59</sup>	40 <sup>60</sup>	1384 <sup>61</sup>
Shaddai					61
Tseva'ot	286	8	4 <sup>62</sup>	18 <sup>63</sup>	316

It is, thus, abundantly clear that YHVH-'Adonai and 'Elohim-'Elohah-'Elohei/a: are overwhelmingly the most common names of God (9459 in number, with YHVH-'Adonai being 68 percent of the Maimonidean list of names, 'Elohim-'Elohah-'Elohei/ai being 25.6 percent of the total, and both constituting 93.7 percent).

## NOTES

1. I am deeply in debt to my learned colleague, Michael Broyde, for an extended scholarly dialogue on this subject. (See his "Defilement of the Hands, Canonization of the Bible, and the Special Status of Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs" in this issue.)

2. F. Kermode, "The Plain Sense of Things," *Midrash and Literature*, ed. G. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 185, 191.

3. Cf. Amos Hacham, Introduction to Esther (Hebrew), *Hamesh Megillot* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1973), 17-18, and other standard introductions. The Targum to Esther 4: 14, for example, reads (additions to the traditional text are in square brackets): "For if you are



silent at this time [and do not pray for the Jews], ease and salvation will arise for the Jews from another place [because of the merit of the fathers of the world, and the Master of the World will save them from the hand of the people of evil speech] while you and [the gentry] of your father's house will be destroyed [...]."

4. *Talmud*, Hullin 139b, quoting Dt. 31:18. This is based on the pun 'astir / Est(h)er. For other readings of God into the text of Esther, cf. *Talmud*, Megilla 7a.

5. *Seder Avodat Yisra'el*, ed. Yitzhak ben Aryeh Yosef Dov (Baer) (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1937), 385, based on Esther 4:16.

6. Introduction to the Book of Esther, *Miqra'ot Gedolot*. Michael Broyde points out to me that this interpretation first appeared in the works of Rav Hai Gaon (8th century), *Otsar ha-Ge'onim* to *Talmud*, Megilla 7a.

7. Hacham, *ibid*.

8. Hacham, *ibid*, emphasis added.

9. *The Megillah: The Book of Esther*, transl. M. Zlotowitz (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1976), xxxvi, emphasis added.

10. *Mishne Torah*, Hilkhos Yesodei ha-Torah 6:1-2; see the commentaries, *ad loc*, for the dispute on whether 'Ehyeh counts or not.

11. *Mishne Torah*, Hilkhos Yesodei ha-Torah 6:5, 9 end.

12. See "Tabulation of the Divine Names" at the end of this article.

13. *Guide for the Perplexed*, I:61.

14. *Guide for the Perplexed*, II:6-7, 45.

15. This may account for the debate about the status of these books in *Mishna*, Yadaim, end of chapter 3; see below and the accompanying article by Broyde.

16. *Talmud*, Shevu'ot 35a; Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Hilkhos Yesodei ha-Torah 6:2.

17. Cf. Rashi, *Metusdat Zion / Metsudat David*, Ibn Ezra, Seforno, etc.

18. There are 22 cases in which *tseva'ot* appears with a possessive suffix; in all but one, the term refers to Israel. Two additional arguments militate against considering these words as names of God: the Talmud records, though rejects, the opinion that *tseva'ot* is never a name of God (Shevu'ot 35b); and, if *tseva'ot* is so clearly a name of God, why did the rabbis take the trouble to interpret each "Solomon" as a name of God which cannot be erased (see below)?

19. (London, 1880; repr. New York: Ktav Publishing, 1975), 3:191-95; my thanks to Michael Broyde for the reference.

20. The manuscripts are divided on the two other occurrences of such one-two word forms: *merhanyah* (Ps. 118:5) and *keryah* (Ex. 17:16). The *yah* ending as such is not unusual; cf. 'asiriyah (Is. 6:13) (names which end in *yah*, etc. To Ginsburg's list add: Pss. 118:17; 122:4; and 135:4).

21. Cf. also R. Gordis, *The Song of Songs* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1961), 1, 26-9, who renders *shalhevetyah* as "a mighty flame" and *bi-tseva'ot* as "by the gazelles."

22. Ed. C. Newsom and S. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox, 1992), 156. The fact that none of the principal names of God appear in Song of Songs is simply not mentioned by most contemporary authorities. Cf. e.g., Hacham in his Introduction to the Song of Songs, *ibid*.; the long article on Song of Songs in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, *ad loc*.; H. Fisch, *Poetry With A Purpose* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), ch. 6; D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), ch. 7.

23. Michael Broyde points out to me that David ben Solomon Ibn Abi Zimra (=Radbaz, 1479-1573) noted the lack of God's name in Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs (*Responsa*, 2:722) while Joseph Hayyim ben Elijah al-Hacham (1835-1909) actually noted the lack of the Tetragrammaton in Song of Songs, Esther, and Ecclesiastes (*Responsa Rav Pe'alim*, 4:11).

24. E.g., Song of Songs 1:2 with words supplied by the Targum in brackets: "[Blessed be God Who gave us the Torah at the hands of Moses, the great scribe, on two tablets of stone; and the six orders of the Mishna; and the text of the Talmud; and Who spoke to them Face to Face as] a man [who] kisses his friend [out of great love, for He loved us more than the other seventy nations]."

25. *Mishna*, Yadaim, end of ch. 3, with *Tosefta*, Sanhedrin 12:10, that one may not trill one's voice when reciting the Song of Songs because that would render it a secular piece of literature and with *Talmud*, Berakhot 57b, that anyone who sees Song of Songs in a dream can expect great acts of kindness. On the very complicated issue of the meaning of the phrase "defiles the hands" and the halakhic conclusions one might draw from its interpretation, cf. Broyde who suggests that some authorities took the phrase to refer to canonical status while others took it to refer to some lesser issue. Among the latter, it could denote a text not written under divine inspiration (even though a part of the canon) or a text that needed to be written down for ritual, recitational purposes. As a practical matter, a book that did not "defile the hands" would be one that did not require an introductory blank page and that could be touched with bare, unwashed hands. This leads Broyde to the conclusion that the purpose of rendering a book capable of "defiling the hands" was to protect it from careless handling, not to promote ritual purity. He concludes, however, that the special status of Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs derives from the absence of the Tetragrammaton in only these three books of the Bible.

26. *Talmud*, Shevu'ot 35b. This is a play on Hebrew, *Shelomoh* [Solomon] and *she-shalom shelo*, Who is the possessor of peace. Note, however, that Ibn Ezra, in his Introduction to Song of Songs, reads this text in the opposite sense: "Each 'Solomon' is King Solomon except . . . which [refers to] the messiah."

27. Cf. Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Hilkhhot She'ar Avot ha-Tum'a 9:5-6, together with Broyde, *art. cit.*

28. Introduction to Song of Songs, *Migra'ot Gedolot*.

29. Ibn Ezra acknowledged and practiced three levels of commentary: explication of words; the "simple" meaning which is the language of passion (which, however, he also calls the level of *mashal*, parable); and the "path of the midrash" which is of the love of God and Israel. He, thus, asserts the existence of the sexually explicit level but denies it on theological and ethical grounds: "Words of passion are not fitting in public" (Introduction to Song of Songs).

30. Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Hilkhhot Teshuva 10:3 and *Guide for the Perplexed*, III:51; Ibn Ezra, *ibid.*, all cited in Hacham, Introduction to Song of Songs.

31. Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Hilkhhot Yesodei ha-Torah 6:9.

32. The Rosh, the *Kesef Mishne*, and Ravad; cited in Hacham, *ibid.*, or in *Avodat ha-Melekh*, *ad loc.* Michael Broyde points out that these issues are also dealt with in *Responsa Kol Mevasser*, 2:43; note especially the last section that deals with halakhic decisions based on Song of Songs.

33. Scherman, lx, lxiv, italics in the original. The early modern *Responsa Ran Pe'alim*, 4:11, also states: "Song of Songs—all of it, from beginning to the end—is an allegory and its matter is concealed and hidden, not according to the simple meaning, God forbid; for [the verses of Song of Songs] have no simple meaning; [they have] only hinted, midrashic, and esoteric meaning, which is not true of the rest of scripture which has [all four meanings]: simple, hinted, midrashic, and esoteric."

34. Cf. e.g., Gordis, 2-4 and Fisch, with Ibn Ezra, Introduction to Song of Songs.

35. Cf. Hacham, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, and others cited above.

36. Gordis, 28-9.

37. *Mishna*, Yadaim, end of ch. 3.

38. The need to assert the priority of the allegorical interpretation was so strong that commentators who sometimes defied the tradition even on matters of halakha (cf. M. Kasher, "The Plain Meaning of Scripture" [Hebrew], *Torah Sheleyma* [New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1956] 17:286-312) did not do so in interpreting Song of Songs. This does not, however, mean that they were unaware of the simple meaning; it only shows that they accepted the dogmatic discipline of rabbinic tradition not to read the text in its "simple" meaning. Cf. also Ibn Ezra and *Metsudat Zion / Metsudat David*.

39. Between parable and that which is to be interpreted according to the parable. On this, see Boyarin's excellent essay, chapter 5.

40. Jacob ben Jacob Moses Lorbeerbaum (1760-1832) wrote a series of commentaries to the Five Megillot called *Imrei Yosher*, of which the *Tsrur ha-Mor* is the commentary to Song of Songs.

41. *Tsrer ha-Mor*, Introduction to Song of Songs, *Migra'ot Gedolot*.
42. *Midrash Haggadol*, Genesis 39:10 (ed. Margulies, 663); cf. also, *Vayyikra Rabba*, 23:11 (ed. Margulies, 543) and *Ruth Rabba*, 6:4 where David is substituted for Palti, even though his resistance is not to sexual desire but to murder (I Sam. 26:8-11). The text on Boaz is more graphic in these other versions: "All that night, his evil impulse pressed him, seducing him with words and saying, 'You are free and she is free; you are seeking a wife and she is seeking a husband. Be aroused and have intercourse with her, and she will be yours with that intercourse.'" Joseph, Boaz, and Palti are grouped together, in a completely different (third) form, in *Talmud*, Sanhedrin 19b-20a.
43. *Midrash Haggadol*, Genesis 39:10 (ed. Margulies, 663); cf. also *Vayyikra Rabba*, 23:10 (ed. Margulies, 452). Palti is mentioned, in a completely different (third) form, in *Talmud*, Sanhedrin 19b, which goes on to specify that he and Michal "did not taste the taste of intercourse."
44. *Midrash Haggadol*, *ibid.* (ed. Margulies, 662) with sources, esp. *Sifre*, Va-'ethanan, 33 (ed. Finkelstein, 59-60), emphasis added. For Abraham the temptation is to take spoils (Gen. 14:22); for David, it is the murder of Saul (I Sam. 26:10); and for Elisha, it is accepting a gift for healing Na'aman (II Kings 5:16).
45. The literature on this is vast. For a man's view, cf. James B. Nelson, *The Intimate Connection: Male Sexuality, Masculine Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), reviewed by me, forthcoming. For the view of a woman psychoanalyst, cf. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).
46. *Midrash Haggadol* and *Vayyikra Rabba*, cited above. The text is fuller in *Midrash Haggadol* but clearer in *Vayyikra Rabba*.
47. Cf. the works of Mieke Bal and Phyllis Trible for other instances of sexual reversals.
48. Rashi points out that there are seven verbs; hence, seven times intercourse. He adds here, citing himself in *Nazir*, that Ya'el "intended this activity as a mitzva: to weaken him so that she would be able to kill him."
49. Rashi: "In the case of the wife of Hever, what evil was there? That that wicked man put filth into her."
50. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, 12.
51. All searches were done on *Judaica Classics Library*, second edition (Chicago: Davka Corp., 1991-1992). The search keys will be spelled out for each search. The sequence of names follows Maimonides, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 6:2.
52. Search key: \*name NOT name; e.g., \*Elohim NOT 'Elohim.
53. Search key: name\* NOT name; e.g., 'Eloham\* NOT 'Eloham.
54. Search key: \*name\* NOT \*name NOT name\*; e.g., \*tseva'ot\* NOT \*tseva'ot NOT tseva'ot\*.
55. Maimonides counts YHVH and 'Adonai as one name; hence there are seven names and eight entries. Maimonides does not list Yah as a name but the statistics are 46 alone, including *hallelu* Yah, and 2 with prefixes (added from S. Mandelkern, *Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae* [Schocken: Jerusalem, 1959]).
56. I rely on Mandelkern for this and have added 'Adonai YHVH.
57. I rely on Mandelkern for this and have added prefixes.
58. The program does not distinguish between "holy" and "secular" spellings.
59. Full search key: 'Elohei/ai\* NOT 'Elohim NOT 'Elohei/ai.
60. Full search key: \*'Elohei/ai\* NOT \*'Elohim NOT \*'Elohei/ai NOT 'Elohei/ai\*.
61. Adding 'Elohim and 'Elohei/ai yields 2546; adding also 'Eloham yields 2603.
62. Corrected for defective spellings with Mandelkern.
63. Corrected for defective spellings with Mandelkern.

# Ghosts

ELIZABETH ROSNER

even in winter  
through snow deep as my thighs  
my father walked me to synagogue  
short-cutting through the parking lot of  
the country club with (it was said)  
a token Jewish member  
and past the skating pond where  
every other neighborhood child was free  
  
in the coat room I removed  
the pants I'd been allowed to wear  
for the snow  
my father already taking his place among  
the davening men while I  
slipped into a row of  
silent women, off to the side where  
we were not permitted to touch  
the Torah or even its garments  
with our unclean hands  
  
my mother went shopping and  
visited with her friends, not inclined  
to participate in the ritual I had no  
choice to refuse, although once  
I stood my ground and said I  
would not go with him and joined  
my mother in the forbidden car  
our hands touching money  
  
I had learned how to recite the prayers  
but never how to pray, not in my  
own language and not  
in my own voice  
it was only much later,  
when I no longer walked with my father  
that I found a moment of grace  
when my hands hovered  
above a pair of lit candles and I  
whispered to the ghosts of every woman  
who came before me, every blessed  
touch of light

---

ELIZABETH ROSNER *teaches writing at Contra Costa College and has recently completed* *Souvenirs & Silences, a family memoir about the holocaust. This poem was a prize-winning entry in the Anna Davidson Rosenberg Poetry Contest for Poems on the Jewish Experience held at the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley, California.*

# ***Who Knows Four? The Imahot in Rabbinic Judaism***

*To the memory of Rabbi William G. Braude, teacher, colleague, and friend*

ALVAN KAUNFER

RECENTLY THERE HAS BEEN MUCH INTEREST IN THE *imahot*—the Matriarchs, and their use in the liturgy. A number of contemporary editions of the siddur have included the *imahot*, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, in the first blessing of the *amidah*, as well as in such prayers as the *mi sheberakh* which have traditionally mentioned only the *avot*—the Patriarchs.<sup>1</sup> Justifications for such additions have been based on sensitivity to gender inclusiveness, as well as on historical precedents of liturgical flexibility, and on halakhic interpretations of the structure and requirements of the *berakhah* formula.<sup>2</sup> However, there has been less attention given to an exploration of the concept of the *imahot* in traditional Jewish sources. Although there have been some attempts to look at classical midrashic images of various female personalities, those studies have been largely focused on individual characters rather than on “the Matriarchs” as a concept and rubric.<sup>3</sup> This article will explore more fully the concept of the *imahot* in rabbinic literature, looking at how this concept was understood in classical sources, and how its submotifs developed within the context of rabbinic Judaism. I will also trace the concept beyond the rabbinic period and see how the *imahot* as a motif was employed in postrabbinic literature. I will suggest that inserting the *imahot* in the liturgy is not a radical idea, but is consistent with a long tradition that recognized and valued the concept of the *imahot*.

## **The Imahot in Biblical and Rabbinic Texts**

The rubric of “the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” occurs numerous times in both Torah and in the subsequent books of the Bible in connection with God’s revelation and covenantal pronouncements. The first time that the phrase occurs with all three of the Patriarchs is at the revelation at the burning bush. In that short narrative, which introduces Moses to God’s plan to rescue the Israelite people, God is described three times as the “God of the father(s) Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”<sup>4</sup> In Leviticus 26 it is the covenant with Jacob, with Isaac, and with Abraham that God will remember; however, neither the word *imahot* nor the set “Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and

---

ALVAN KAUNFER is the rabbi of Temple Emanu-El, Providence, Rhode Island. He has written about midrash and the teaching of midrash.

Leah” ever appear in Tanakh. Imahot as a concept is absent in biblical literature. Both the Jewish Encyclopedia (1905) and the Encyclopedia Judaica (1972) have entries for “Patriarchs” but no corresponding entry for “Matriarchs.” The Matriarchs as a concept is treated only in passing in both articles, under the heading of the Patriarchs. Given the strong patriarchal emphasis of traditional Judaism, and given the hundreds of entries in rabbinic literature for the *avot*, and “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” this may not be surprising.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, the motif of the *imahot* definitely exists both in classical Talmudic, and especially in midrashic sources which deal with the biblical narrative. The number of occurrences of the term *imahot* and of the set Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah is not insignificant, appearing some 76 times as *imahot*, and 15 times naming the individual matriarchs.<sup>6</sup> While a number of those occurrences are parallel versions of the same exegetical comments, the concept of “the *imahot*” was clearly a recognized motif in rabbinic literature. It would seem that at least to some rabbinic sages, the Matriarchs were deemed worthy of mention as founders of Judaism, along with their male counterparts.

The motif of the *imahot* includes several major midrashic submotifs which, in turn, are transformed and transfigured in numerous permutations. James Kugel has effectively demonstrated how midrashic motifs can travel through both time and biblical contexts as those motifs evolve.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes the motif is attached to one key exegesis which is then reapplied to other verses. Our concept enjoys a similar varied life as it is employed in a number of submotifs. These include the merit of the Matriarchs, the Matriarchs as prophets, the barren Matriarchs, the use of the Matriarchs as metaphors, and the six Matriarchs. Each of these is worth some discussion.

### The Merit of the Matriarchs

*Zekhut Avot*, the merit of the forefathers, is one of the basic ideas in rabbinic theology. Schechter explored the notion in his classic essay in *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*.<sup>8</sup> The forefathers’ faith serves as a reservoir of merit upon which the Jewish people may call to plead their case for mercy in God’s judgment of their individual and corporate deeds. Schechter mentions, in passing, the parallel notion of *zekhut imahot*, the merit of the Matriarchs, but his exploration of the motif is minimal.<sup>9</sup>

However, *zekhut imahot* is a valid rabbinic concept, appearing in several forms in numerous texts. The motif of *zekhut imahot* seems to focus on an exegesis of the word *gevaot*, “the hills,” in a number of biblical passages. The exegesis is clearly well known in rabbinic circles. Though it is difficult

to ascertain which verse was the original locus for the exegesis, we might surmise, by its simple repetition throughout the literature, that it was connected with Numbers 23:9:

“For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him” – “the top of the rocks” refers to the merit of the fathers, “from the hills” refers to the merit of the mothers.<sup>10</sup>

A similar exegesis connects the idea with the verse, “The voice of my beloved, behold he comes, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills” (Song 2:8). “Leaping upon the mountains” means the merit of the Patriarchs, and “skipping upon the hills” means the merit of the Matriarchs.<sup>11</sup> The choice of “hills” as a metaphor for the Matriarchs would seem to be an apt one, reflecting the contours of the female body.

That association, of the merit of the matriarchs with *gevaot*, “the hills,” leads to a fascinating use of the concept, applied to the story of the battle with Amalek. A Tannaitic Midrash cited in the *Mekhilta* states:

‘Tomorrow I will stand upon the top of the hill’ (*givah*) (Ex. 16:19). R. Eleazar of Modim says, (Moses said) Let us declare tomorrow a fast day and be ready, relying on the deeds of the ancestors. For ‘the top’ (*rosh*) refers to the deeds of the fathers; ‘the hill’ (*ha-givah*), refers to the deeds of the mothers. . . . ‘And Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the Top of the Hill.’ (v.10) This bears upon what we have already said above—to make mention of the deeds of the fathers and of the deeds of the mothers, as it is said: ‘For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him.’ (Num. 23:9).<sup>12</sup>

Moses, in this midrash, is calling upon the *zekhut imahot* as well as the *zekhut avot* in a prayerful supplication to God for aid in the imminent danger of the attack by Amalek. The liturgical context is intriguing especially given the more current uses of the *imahot* in the siddur. One wonders whether this midrash reflects actual rabbinic prayers for fast days which included both the *avot* and *imahot*, but which are now lost. In any case, it is clear that rabbinic tradition included calling upon the merit of the Matriarchs to rescue the Jewish people in times of distress.

What happens, however, when the reserve of merit runs out and the “credit” upon which the Jewish people have drawn begins to wane and falter? *Leviticus Rabbah* states:

If you see that the merit of the Patriarchs is failing and the merit of the Matriarchs slipping away, go and occupy yourself with deeds of loving kindness. (“depend on God’s grace”—in a parallel version)<sup>13</sup>

Here the understanding seems to be that there are parallel and equivalent reserves of merit of the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs. Although it must be said that the merit of the Patriarchs is the dominant concept in



rabbinic literature, texts such as these indicate that an idea of *zekhut imahot* not only existed, but held a prominent and parallel status at least in some rabbinic circles.

Not only was the merit of the Matriarchs a source for help in times of distress, but it was extended to more positive contexts. The Exodus from Egypt was viewed as a reward for the dedication of the Matriarchs.

The Holy One . . . at length set them free from Egypt, but did so only as a reward for the conduct of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah; as a reward for Sarah's taking Hagar and bringing her to Abraham's couch; as a reward for Rebekah who, when asked, "Will you go with this man?" said, "I will go." (Gen. 24:58) . . . as a reward for Rachel because she took Bilhah and brought her to Jacob's couch; and as a reward for Leah because she took Zilpah and brought her to Jacob's couch.<sup>14</sup>

This midrashic tradition, which is probably a later development, considers the earlier notion of *zekhut imahot* not only as a reserve of merit to be tapped in prayerful supplication, but also as the key factor in the saving of the Jewish people at the Exodus. This midrash reflects the broader midrashic motif that the righteousness of the Israelite women contributed to their liberation from bondage.<sup>15</sup> The power of the concept is thus expanded to include historic significance: the *imahot* become the major factor in the redemption of the Jewish People.

In another positive context, the notion of *zekhut imahot* is extended to the covenant between God and the Patriarchs. On the verse in Leviticus 26:42, "I have remembered (*et*) my covenant with Jacob, and also (*et*) my covenant with Isaac, and also (*et*) my covenant with Abraham will I remember," the Tannaitic midrash, *Sifra*, comments that *et* refers to God's covenant with the Matriarchs. God not only made his covenant with the Patriarchs; he made it with their wives, the Matriarchs, as well.<sup>16</sup>

### The Matriarchs as Prophets

A second major rabbinic leitmotif concerning the Matriarchs is that they were prophets, along with the Patriarchs.<sup>17</sup> The archetype was Rebekah. After Jacob steals the blessing from Esau and Esau plots to kill his brother, the text in Genesis 27:42 comments that "the words of Esau were told (*vayugad*) to Rebekah." *Genesis Rabbah* states in the name of R. Haggai quoting R. Isaac: "The Matriarchs were prophetesses, and Rebekah was among the Matriarchs."<sup>18</sup> It seems that the Rabbis based this tradition on the passive voice *vayugad*—Rebekah "was told," and "by whom was she told? by none other than *ruah hakodesh*—The Holy Spirit."<sup>19</sup> However, the Rabbis had ample textual support in the Torah itself for the fact that God revealed future

events to Rebekah. God directly communicated with her in the oracular message: "Two nations are in your womb, and two separate peoples will issue from your body (Gen. 23:23)." On that verse there was a strong midrashic tradition that "an angel" or "the Word" spoke to Rebekah.<sup>20</sup> That both the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs were considered prophets is also expressed in the exegesis of the verse from Psalms 105:15: "Touch not My anointed ones, and do not harm My prophets." "My anointed ones" are interpreted to refer to the Patriarchs, while "My prophets" refer to the Matriarchs. This verse is used in conjunction with "It was told to Rebekah," in the various transmissions of this tradition that both the Matriarchs and the Patriarchs had the status of prophets.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Barren Matriarchs**

One midrashic theme which recurs in a number of sources is the theme of "the barren Matriarchs" which may strike a discordant note to the modern reader. In *Genesis Rabbah* we read:

Why were the Matriarchs barren? R. Levi said in R. Shila's name and R. Helbo in R. Johanan's name: Because The Holy One, blessed be He, desires their prayers and their supplications, as it is written, 'O my dove, you are like the clefts of the rock' (Song 2:14). Why did I make you barren? So that 'I might see your countenance, that I might hear your voice.'<sup>22</sup>

It would seem that their lengthy state of childlessness led the Patriarchs to pray to God more frequently, and God longs to hear the prayers of the Patriarchs. However, the idea that the Matriarchs' barrenness provides opportunities only for their *husbands* to approach God is not completely uniform in all of the sources. In *Song of Songs Rabbah*<sup>23</sup> we find a similar exegesis with a different ending: "Why did God keep the Matriarchs barren so long? Because God wished to hear *their* prayer." In any case, as uncomfortable as this Midrash may be to the modern reader, it was clearly meant to project a positive quality in the Matriarchs, given the context of the ancient rabbinic writers. The Matriarchs were responsible for the desired prayers being offered to God.

### **Other Metaphoric Applications**

The Matriarchs became symbols not only of merit, of prophecy, and of prayer; they also became metaphors of other concepts associated with the number four and with particularly female qualities.

In *Pesikta De Rab Kahana*, the "four species" taken on Sukkot are interpreted to symbolize aspects of the lives of the four Matriarchs:

'The fruit of the tree *hadar*' (Lev. 23:40). *Hadar* stands for our mother Sarah whom the Holy One gave a majestic bearing in her old age. . . . 'A branch of palm trees' stands for our mother Rebekah: like the palm tree which bears both fruit and thorns, so Rebekah bore a righteous man and a wicked man. 'And a tree whose boughs are leafy' stands for our mother Leah: as the myrtle tree is rich in leaves, so Leah was rich in children. 'And willows of the brook' stand for our mother Rachel: as the willow in the *lulav* cluster wilts before the other three plants in the cluster do, so Rachel died before her sister did.<sup>24</sup>

The fruitfulness of the four species may be an apt referent especially for females, indicating fertility. Similarly, in the exegesis of Abraham's future blessing, the three times "great" mentioned is understood to refer to the three future Patriarchs, while the four occurrences of "blessing," refer to the four future Matriarchs.<sup>25</sup> The implication is that we are to associate the Mothers metaphorically with the notion of "blessing," which may be more relational and thus a more particularly female metaphor than "greatness."

In an exegesis of a verse in the Song of Deborah, "Above women in the tent shall [Yael] be blessed," "women in the tent" is understood as referring to Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah.<sup>26</sup> These four women were the symbols of the "home," as in the famous midrash in which Rebekah is envisioned as continuing Sarah's quality of hospitality, as Rebekah enters to occupy Sarah's "tent."<sup>27</sup>

### The Six Matriarchs

There is some disagreement as to how many Matriarchs there were. The assumption is that the Matriarchs includes only the four wives Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah. Yet, in some sources we find that Jacob's concubines, Zilpah and Bilhah, are included as Matriarchs, making six:

"And they brought their offering before the Lord, six covered wagons" (Num. 7:3) Six corresponding to the six Matriarchs—Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Zilpah, and Bilhah.<sup>28</sup>

Other sources connect the number six with the six days of creation.<sup>29</sup> It would seem that some rabbinic traditions recognize that Bilhah and Zilpah were also mothers of the Tribes of Israel and thus deserve the status of "Matriarchs."

In most instances, however, the number is limited to four; indeed, the Tractate *Semahot* declares that one may not call any "fathers," "our father" except for the three Patriarchs; and not any "mothers," our "mother" except for the four Matriarchs.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the unit Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah appears several times, as in the text cited about their merit contributing to the Exodus from Egypt, and in the metaphoric applications mentioned above.

### In Later Literature

The Matriarchs are mentioned in a variety of liturgical works in medieval and early modern times. The most well known of these is the fifteenth century poem sung at the Seder, "Who Knows One?" in which the answer to "Who knows four?" is the four Matriarchs; yet, there are other medieval poems which mention the Matriarchs. In a less well known *piyut* for the eve of Rosh Hashanah attributed to Gershom ben Judah of the tenth century, the righteous deeds of our forefathers are invoked. But then the poet asks that God recall, "*berit avot v'imahot v'ha-shevatim*," the covenant with the Patriarchs, Matriarchs, and tribes.<sup>31</sup> In another medieval *piyut*, recited in the Italian rite on Shabbat Ha-gadol, after asking Isaac who was bound on the altar to stand by God's right, the four Matriarchs are asked to stand on God's left to intercede for Israel.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps one of the most intriguing later liturgical developments of the *imahot* theme comes in the Yiddish *Tehinah* literature. These prayers and devotions for Jewish women, so popular among Ashkenazic Jewry, employed ample use of the *imahot* in expressing the deepest hopes and prayers of the women who recited them. In a "Tehinah of Sore, Rivke, Rokhl, and Leye," we hear heartfelt supplication:

Answer us this month, through the merit of our Mother Sore, for whose sake You commanded and said: 'Do not dare touch my anointed ones.' . . . And may the merit of our mother Rivke, who caused our father Yankev to receive the blessings from his father Yitskhok, cause the blessings to be fulfilled soon through her children Yisroel. And may the merit of our faithful mother Rokhl, to whom You promised that through her merit her children Yisroel would be delivered from exile, cause the promises to be fulfilled. . . . And for the merit of our mother Leye . . . that through her merit You may illumine our eyes so that we may overcome darkness.<sup>33</sup>

Turning to the merit of the Matriarchs for help becomes very personalized in these prayers. For example, a woman whose own mother is named Leye prays:

Because of the merits of our Matriarchs, Sore, Rivke, Rokhl, and Leye, and the merit of my dear mother Leye, who also pleads before God—praised be He—on my behalf, may my wanderings serve as an expiation for my sins.<sup>34</sup>

The Matriarchs, in these *Tehinahs*, become tangibly accessible to the woman praying. The sense of complete identification with and closeness to the Matriarchs is striking in this form of very personalized prayer. Here it is clear that the merit of the Matriarchs becomes more than an obscure rabbinic concept. The *imahot* concept is transformed into a central *Tehinah* motif.

## Conclusions

This brief survey of the concept of the *imahot* indicates that it is not an invention of the past decade to infuse prayers with more egalitarian language. On the contrary, the *imahot* is a concept central to the classical sources of rabbinic and postrabbinic literature. Granted, it existed in connection with the concept of the *avot*—the Patriarchs—but it was not merely a subset of that idea. In many sources as we have seen the concept of the *imahot* was a parallel and independent concept. The *imahot* had their own merit and their own source of divine prophecy, analogous to, but separate from that of the *avot*. Their merit was credited with bringing the exodus and they, too, were recipients of God's covenant.

In addition, the metaphoric symbolism of the *imahot* was characteristically female: they were the guardians of the "tent" and home; they were the "blessing" promised to Abraham, and they were the "fruitfulness" represented by the four species.

The sages who created and transmitted these traditions recognized the significant role that the mothers of Judaism played in preserving both faith and family. In their eyes, the Matriarchs were neither silent nor invisible. Rather, they were partners in the development of Judaism and thus worthy of recognition. This recognition of the Matriarchs is even more noteworthy given the patriarchal society in which the authors of these texts lived. Moreover, it is significant that many of the sources refer to the *imahot* in prayerful and liturgical settings. From the early midrashic prayer of Moses, through the medieval *piyutim* and into the premodern *Tehinahs*, the merit of Matriarchs was invoked to come to the aid of the Jew in distress.

It therefore seems quite in concert with this tradition to include the *imahot* in the opening *berakhah* of the *Amidah*. After all, in the first *berakhah* of the *amidah*, we turn to God who "remembers the loving kindness of the *avot*." As Moses "made mention of the deeds of the *avot* and the *imahot*," as the *paytanim* asked God to "recall the covenant of the *avot* and *imahot*" and asked the *imahot* to stand at God's right hand, and as the *Tehinahs* pleaded for God to answer "through the merit of Sore, Rivke, Rokhl, and Leye"; we, too, might direct our prayers to, "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, who remembers the loving kindness of the *avot* and *imahot*." Such an addition would not be so much an innovation as it would be a restoration of the concept to its use in former times.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, *Kol Haneshamah* (Reconstructionist), and the notes there on the Amidah; and *On the Wings of Awe* Mahzor (Hillel). The new *Siddur Sim Shalom* (Conservative) will contain the *imahot* in an alternative Amidah. Note that the Orthodox siddur, *Rinat Yisrael* (Sephardic), includes the *imahot* in the *mi sheberakh* for the sick. Also see Harry P. Solomon, "Including the Matriarchs: A proposal for Birkat ha-Mazon," *Reconstructionist*, March, 1988, pp. 12-14.
2. Joel E. Rembaum, "Regarding the Inclusion of the Names of the Matriarchs in the First Blessing of the Amidah," unpublished paper adopted by the Law Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly, March 21, 1990.
3. See, for example, Linda Kuzmack, "Aggadic Approaches to Biblical Women," in *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*, Elizabeth Koltun, ed. (New York: Schocken, 1976). For a more serious midrashic character study of a biblical woman which could serve as a model for other character analyses, see, Devora Steinmetz, "A portrait of Miriam in Rabbinic Midrash," *Proofs* 8 (1988), pp. 35-65.
4. Exodus 3:6, 15, 16.
5. The Davka CD-ROM locates over 900 entries for *avot*, and over 700 entries for the set "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."
6. The Davka CD-ROM counts 76, excluding the general use of *imahot* as "mothers" in halakhic contexts. It is interesting to note that the four Matriarchs are named far fewer times, mostly in later midrashic collections.
7. James Kugel, *In Potiphar's House* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990).
8. Solomon Schechter, "The Zachuth of the Fathers," in *Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken, 1909, 1961); see also, Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Press, 1987), pp. 496-508.
9. Schechter, p. 172.
10. *Bemidbar Rabbah* 20, 19 and parallels listed in *Vayikra Rabbah* 36,6, Margulies, p. 852, note to line 6.
11. *B. Rosh Hashanah* 11a.
12. *Mekhilla*, Amalek 1, Lauterbach II, pp. 142-143; Horovitz-Rabin, p. 179. I have followed Lauterbach's translation with minor changes. See Horovitz's note to line 6 for parallels.
13. *Vayikra Rabbah* 36, 6. See Margulies, p. 852. Note that this midrash quotes Isa. 54:10, again linking the Matriarchs with the word "*gevaot*."
14. *Tanna Debe Eliyahu*, Friedmann, p. 138; Braude, p. 340.
15. *Shemot Rabbah* 1, 12. See notes in A. Shinan, p. 54.
16. Sifra, Weiss, 112c; see also, *Vayikra Rabbah* 36,5, Margulies, p. 850.
17. *Seder Olam*, p.92 (see next note), and Gen. 20:7 where Abraham is called "navi."
18. *Bereshit Rabbah* 67,9 and 72,6. See Theodor's note on p. 765. See, also, Ratner's note 25 to *Seder Olam*, p. 92, in which he quotes a number of parallel sources as well as suggests that the *Seder Olam* text should read, "How do we know that the Patriarchs [and Matriarchs] were called prophets?"
19. *Midrash Tehillim* 105,4, Buber, p. 450; Braude, p. 182. See, especially, Buber's note 14.
20. See Theodor, p. 188 and *J. Sota* Chap. 7, and Theodor's note to line 4 on p. 765.
21. See notes 18 and 19.
22. *Bereshit Rabbah* 45,14, Theodor, p. 450 and note; also Ginzberg, *Legends*, V, p. 231, n. 116. See B. Hullin 60b where God longs for the prayers of the righteous in general.
23. *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 2,14.
24. *Pesikta De Rab Kahana*, Mandelbaum, p. 415; Braude, p. 422; *Vayikra Rabbah* 30, 10; Margulies, p. 708.
25. *Bereshit Rabbah* 39,11.
26. *B. Nazir* 23b. See Tosafot for the connection of "tent" with each. See also *Bereshit Rabbah* 48,15.
27. *Bereshit Rabbah* 60,16.
28. *Bemidbar Rabbah* 12,17; *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 6,4,2 and parallels.
29. *Esther Rabbah* 1,11; *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 6,15.

30. *Semahot* 1, 12, quoted in *B. Berakhot* 16b.
31. Abraham Rosenfeld, *The Authorized Selichot for the Whole Year* (New York: Judaica Press, 1984), p.168.
32. "Kakh Gazru," *Mahzor Kol HaShanah Kefi Minhag Italiani* (Livorno, 1856), p.91. My thanks to the JTS library for helping to locate this source based on Ginzberg, *Legends* VI, p. 7, n. 39.
33. Tracy Guren Klirs, *The Merit of Our Mothers* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1992), pp. 84–86, Transliteration of names follows that in the book. Note the use of Psalms 105:15 indicating that the author knew of the exegesis of the verse referring to the Matriarchs. For additional examples, see, *Tehinah Rav Peninim* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1916), pp.176–183, where the merit of both Patriarchs and Matriarchs are invoked.
34. *Ibid.*, p.12.



## *Bar Mitzvah in Szekesfehervar*

P E T E R K E N E Z

I HATED SZEKESFEHERVAR THE FIRST TIME I SAW IT. HOW could I not hate it? I was a sophisticated ten year old—well, actually in July 1946 only nine years and three months old, but considered myself to be ten since I was in my tenth year. I came from the big city of Budapest, and what could this little provincial town of forty thousand offer me? Worst of all, my mother and I were moving to this town because she was about to remarry. The Germans occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944, and my father was taken off a streetcar at the border of Budapest as a Jew the very next day. I know this, because he managed to send a message to us before he was taken to Auschwitz. I also know how he died. He survived until November 1944 when the camp was closed down, and then was shot on a forced march in January 1945. A friend of his came back to tell us the circumstances of his death, but that poor man was in such terrible shape that he died in the summer of 1945 a few weeks after his return.

So, I knew that I would never again see father, but I could not quite believe it. People were talking about instances where those considered dead actually returned. I felt my father would be among these. After all, the last note which he managed to send us, still from within Hungary said: don't worry, I will come back, even from the dead. As I was becoming conscious of myself as an independent being, the picture of my father grew ever larger in my mind. As a small child I had loved my father as much as other children love theirs. I was proud of him and I always understood that he was liked and respected by others. I imitated him to the point of ridiculousness. I could see that I had some status because I belonged to him.

The trouble was that the image of this good and decent man gradually became disembodied in my mind. He had no relative left; uncles, nephews, cousins—everyone was killed. Maybe if his brother, Imre, who in many ways was like him, had survived I could have associated my father's qualities with a live human being. As it was, my father became an idea. I was convinced that everything that was good and successful in me came from him. And if I failed, I knew that if my father were alive and with me, he would have helped, he would have protected me. I was weak and ill coordinated, but if my father were alive, I would have become a sportsman like him. Later on I was desperate to find out more about my father's background, but I could not. And I could learn almost nothing of my grandfather: what kind of man was he? I suspect that my painful sense of separateness while I was growing up was the consequence of having been deprived of a family background.

Since mother idolized father's memory so much, I was unpleasantly surprised to find that hardly a year after we learned about his death she started to go out with men. I knew very little about these men. She did not bring them home, and she said nothing about them to me. She was only 35, still a good-looking woman, slightly

---

PETER KENEZ is Professor of History at the University of California at Santa Cruz. He is the author of six books, most recently, *Varieties of Fear: Growing up Jewish Under Nazism and Communism*, published by American University Press. This essay expands on materials included in this autobiography.

inclined to plumpness, and naturally flirtatious. I suppose precisely because she had had a good marriage she wanted to get married again.

I met only one of these men, and he was to become my stepfather. It was in late May 1946. I came home from school late. I had been wandering by myself in the streets and expected to be scolded by mother, but she was not at home. I ate supper, talked to grandmother about this and that, and was getting sleepy when around 8 o'clock mother came home with a man. He was a rather good-looking man, barrel chested, silver haired. His head looked like an egg, wider at the bottom than at the top. I was tired, not particularly interested and not at all friendly. My mother introduced him as "Dezso Bacsi." I realized that he sought me out and wanted to talk to me. I was not drawn to him.

Meeting Dezso obviously would have made little impression on me, except that very soon I came to realize that he would play a large role in my life. Dezso, who was 46 at the time, lived in a little town, called Szekesfehervar. His wife had been killed by the Nazis. He wanted to remarry, and he actually preferred to marry someone with a child. He had promised himself in the labor battalion that if he survived he would help to bring up a Jewish child. He loved children and considered himself too old to have one of his own. He had a younger brother in Budapest, and he came to the city with the explicit purpose of finding a wife. His sister-in-law knew a friend of my mother, and it was she who brought them together.

Mother brought him home in order to inspect me. I may have passed the inspection better because I was sleepy. Had I been sharper and had a clearer idea of what was going on I might have done more to prevent the match. Because, of course, I was against it. Any nine-year-old male child is bound to be jealous of his mother. How could this man, just a country hick, as far as I was concerned, take the place of my father? How could she consider replacing him at all?

Next day we had a serious talk. Mother said that she considered marriage entirely because of me.

"You need a father. You need someone who can provide for you."

I was flattered that mother was discussing such matters with me, and was trying hard to give a measured response. I wanted to improve my credibility.

"Maybe Father will come back."

"No, Father will not come back."

There were tears in her eyes. The date of the wedding was set for August fifth.

I was not invited; in those days children did not attend their parents' weddings. I understand it was an extremely simple affair that took only a few minutes. I was, however, part of the family picture taken by a professional photographer on that occasion. Mother smiles lightly. She looks surprisingly young. Dezso's smile is pained. I don't think this was a sign of some unhappiness, that was just the way he smiled. I am glum. My hair is very short. Dezso wanted to have my head shaved, because he believed that a shaved head during the summer was healthy and that such treatment would make my hair stronger and that I would not get bald later. The roots needed air, he told me, adding proudly that his hair as a child had always been shaved. Mother would not hear of it. She thought, and, of course, I agreed, that peasants had their heads shaved in order to prevent infestations of lice. My extremely short hair was the result of a compromise.

The night after the wedding, the first time that I slept alone in this alien room was the worst. The doors were closed and I was alone in the room. I had the feeling

that it would always be like this. At that time I thought that Budapest was the center of the world. There were so many people, movies, blue and red neon lights in the shop windows, cars; I did not want to leave my friends behind, my cousin Robi, who was like a brother, and my school. I was not interested in anything the country could offer. I hated Szekesfehervar; I hated everything about it. I did not like the quiet. The noises you could hear, a dog barking, drunks singing or quarreling, sounded unfriendly. I cried myself to sleep.

In my first couple of years in Szekesfehervar, Dezso and I established a rather warm relationship. He was not a reflective man, and he never talked about his past. To be sure, I never asked, but I must have felt that I was not supposed to probe, that he would tell me about himself as much as he wanted. Everything I know about his prewar life, and it is not much, I found out later from mother.

He was born in Enying, a large village not far from Szekesfehervar. He had many brothers and sisters, but only a brother and a sister survived the Nazis. He had had two previous marriages. The first one ended in a divorce because Dezso found out that his wife was having an affair with a lawyer. His second wife was a daughter of a rabbi, a woman crippled from childhood, who always walked with a cane. According to mother, she was an embittered woman who looked down on her husband, and they did not live well together.

He also had a daughter by his first wife, who would have been exactly my age, but she together with the previous wives were taken to Auschwitz. It is curious that he never spoke of his dead daughter, and I never even saw a photo of her. Was this because he had loved her so much that the memory was painful? Or, on the contrary, did she remind him of his unfaithful wife? Mother told me, and I believe she was right, that Dezso saw me as a substitute for his dead child, and very much wanted to be my father. That it did not quite turn out that way was not entirely his fault.

Before the war he made a modest living by operating a shop where small items, such as watering cans, were made out of tin. He survived the war in a workers' battalion, came back to Szekesfehervar penniless, and found himself utterly alone. Then he had a brilliantly simple idea: he hired kids for practically nothing to collect spent shells, which could be found in great abundance in the streets of the town. Dezso resold the shells as scrap metal and quickly made enough money to open a small soda-water bottling company, hired people to work in his tin-shop, and still had a bit of money left over. He was the kind of businessman who operated well in the confused circumstances of postwar Hungary. He had no idea of high finance and would never have made it on Wall Street, but he had simple cunning, knew how to deal with people, was a tireless worker, and was not afraid of risks.

He loved all sorts of wheeler-dealing. He would go to the market, which took place in this little town on every Wednesday and Saturday, and bargain with the peasants. Then he was in his element. He walked around in the market, with his hat on, summer and winter, carrying a basket, surveying the field. He did not buy what we needed, he bought whatever seemed to him a bargain. He was a basically honest man, but his business ethics did not prevent him from interfering with the scale a bit with his foot when he was buying something. He always bought things in large quantities. Once he came home with 50 kilograms of apricots. He bought them cheap, but, of course, half of them soon rotted. My mother, by contrast, was cautious to a fault. She usually opposed every business venture Dezso embarked on. But Dezso, at least in these matters, never listened to her. Some of his ideas in fact turned

out badly. At one time he bought several pig's legs that he smoked and hung in our attic. Maggots got into the meat and they all had to be thrown away. Mother would not let Dezso forget about this unfortunate affair for a long time.

Soon after our arrival Dezso bought an alcohol-making factory in a little village, not far from Szekesfehervar. This was a serious undertaking, with about 15 workers. Mother opposed the idea, arguing that Dezso knew nothing about the alcohol-making business. Dezso said that he would find a manager who did understand the business; indeed, he found a good man. Unfortunately that good and honest man was, or became, an alcoholic, and was in the process of killing himself. He lived in the village where the factory was, and there was absolutely nothing to do after work but to drink. Nevertheless the business, at least for a while, flourished.

These were the best years of Dezso's life. He liked to make money. He did not have expensive tastes, did not care for clothes, or for good furniture. The new sideboard which my parents bought for the living room a couple of years after our arrival was entirely at mother's urging. He enjoyed the activity of moneymaking, and enjoyed that at least some people deferred to him because of his money. Dozens of people owed him money and he liked that. He liked to help out people, and enjoyed the patronlike relationships that such good deeds occasioned. As I walked the street from our house to the center of town, I could stop by the barber and get a free haircut: the barber owed Dezso money. Dezso himself went there every day to get his shave. The barber treated him with exaggerated deference that I found both amusing and embarrassing. Next to the barbershop I could get a free ice cream cone, since the man who had just opened his little shop also got money from Dezso. Once in a while when Dezso also had an ice cream, I watched him with bewilderment and awe: he demolished his entire cone in two or three bites.

Dezso had only four years of education. I never saw him reading a book, and he only occasionally read a newspaper. His knowledge of the world was spotty, but that did not prevent him from talking about things as an expert. He always spoke with great conviction and never expressed a doubt. I always found it extremely strange that he could sit in the house during the winter, next to the stove, usually with his hat on, and just look at the wall. In summer he preferred to sit in the backyard. His pleasures were simple: he liked to eat and liked to cook. He did not care for elaborate dishes, but preferred meat and potatoes. Instead of cakes, he liked *pogácsa*, a Hungarian pastry which was like a muffin, made with bacon fat and salty. Instead of chocolate torte, the one thing my mother enjoyed preparing, Dezso liked pastry with cottage cheese in it. He had arthritis and suffered backaches, and he liked me to rub his back. He was a strong man, inclined to fatness, and the only way I could make an impression on him was by standing on him and massaging his back, not with my weak arms but with my feet.

His third marriage was the most successful, and the first years of the marriage were the most trouble free. Money smoothed over many difficulties. He did not have a romantic nature, and I doubt that he ever said to mother that he loved her, but I think he really did. He liked her good looks. He was not a snob by any means, nonetheless he gravitated toward what seemed to him "better classes." It could not have been an accident that all three of his wives came from these circles. On the other hand, perhaps perversely, he was unwilling or unable to do anything to make himself more acceptable. They quarreled occasionally. Mother did not want him to lend money to others, she disapproved of purchases that seemed extravagant to her, but wanted to

spend money on the house or clothes. Mother also quarreled with him for his boorish behavior, for not taking off his hat when he came into the room. She was not tactful. She made it perfectly clear that she had loved her first husband the way she would never love the second. In fact she constantly talked about my father, and all comparisons, needless to say, favored her first husband. She herself fasted and made me fast on my father's birthday, February third. In her memory my father was promoted to a saint, and I colluded with her. It suited my needs. On occasion she would just sit with tears in her eyes. Dezso would say "Your mother is dreaming." I, who was a literal-minded child, could not understand how one can dream sitting up.

Dezso and mother were silently fighting over a life-style. Mother, who had been a good wife to my father, now had to adjust to a very different person, with very different ideas about right and wrong and about what is worth doing in life. In these years at least, it was she who did most of the adjusting but, unconsciously, was ashamed of it. Once mother, Dezso, and I, were walking in Budapest, and on the other side of the street I noticed old friends of my father, people with whom we had gone hiking many times before. Mother pretended not to notice them: she did not want to introduce Dezso to people who had been father's friends.

My relations with Dezso were best at the beginning, but they gradually deteriorated. In the first year or two he would tell me stories. One Sunday morning he tried to explain to Robi, who was visiting, and me about the birds and the bees. I suppose he thought that it was his responsibility. Robi had already enlightened me about the fundamentals, and so we just enjoyed his embarrassment. In fact Dezso did not do a good job, and if we had to depend on information from him alone we would have been utterly confused.

As time went on we talked to one another less and less. I remember walking with him in the street for long periods without saying anything. He obviously would have felt more comfortable with a less shy and retiring and more physically active child. He was, in fact, very fond of Robi. He did not quite know what to do with me. Once mother and Dezso spent the weekend without me in Budapest. They went to a nightclub and evidently had a very good time. I hated to be left home with the maid, Annus, and it seems Dezso felt guilty for leaving me at home. To please me he brought me a present of a toy duck. The head of the delicately balanced duck periodically fell into a dish of cold water, which made the liquid within it contract, and the duck fell back on his feather-covered behind. The movement went on and on as a *perpetuum mobile*. I did not know what to do with the present. I knew that Dezso meant well, and I was so sad that I could have cried. I did not want this duck.

Mother never liked to cook or clean the house. In any case, now that we had Annus, there was nothing for her to do. To keep her occupied, Dezso bought her a textile store on Main Street. Mother knew nothing of the business, so she needed a partner who did. This partner was Ibi, a young woman in her late twenties. Ibi's parents had owned a store before the war, but the entire family was taken to Auschwitz and she alone returned. Ibi needed capital to reopen the store. She was tall, gaunt, with coarse, mannish features and, I thought, ugly. She lived by herself, and she had no one. She liked to come to our house, and as people who live by themselves tend to do, talked too much. As a result of the trauma of Auschwitz, she was not quite right in her head. She was moody, suffered severe depressions and said odd things about nonexistent lovers. Often I could not follow her thought associations. I was somewhat afraid of her because she seemed strange and unpredictable.

A few years later, after we left Szekesfehervar, she was no longer capable of maintaining a job, and was in and out of mental wards. She died in gruesome circumstances: the concierge in her apartment building did not discover the corpse for an entire week. No one ever knocked on the door, no one noticed her absence, no one missed her. It seems she starved herself to death.

At this point Ibi was still capable of functioning and running a business. The partners got along well, and even though Ibi was only slightly younger than mother, she deferred to her. Mother enjoyed her independence. She traveled to Budapest and dealt with the distributors, learned quickly what kind of textiles the peasants, who made up the bulk of the customers, were interested in, and became a good saleswoman. Some textiles such as cotton, for example, were rationed, which introduced serious complications: little stamps had to be collected and accounted for. Wednesdays and Saturdays, the days when peasants came from the surrounding villages to the market, the store was so crowded that the two women could not sit down for a moment.

Mother quickly found friends. The town had a closely knit Jewish community, where everyone knew everyone else. Here the Nazi destruction had been far more thorough than in Budapest, and only about a tenth of the Jewish population survived. The two to three hundred Jews who lived here were almost all returnees from camps, wounded people. I cannot remember an intact family; people now were just attempting to put their lives together. Those who had lost husbands married those who had lost wives. But children could not be replaced, and none survived the camps. Aside from me, there was only one Jewish boy in town.

Being Jewish and being middle class was synonymous; the people we got to know were all shop keepers, tradesmen and bookkeepers. In a matter of weeks we got to know dozens of people. In our street, not far from us lived the Fischers, Jozsi bacsi and Lilly neni, a couple in their forties. They had returned from different concentration camps, and found their house bombed out. They stayed with friends until it was rebuilt. Jozsi bacsi had a fumigating business; in the postwar world there was great need for his services. Unlike us, they had a telephone, and in emergencies we would go to their house to make a call. I liked to go to their house, because Jozsi bacsi talked politics with me as if I were an adult. He was the most leftist person I knew and had voted for the Communists. He told me once why he believed that it was correct to take away wealth.

"Imagine that there is a basin of water in which you put a tall vase, full of water. You break the vase and the water level in the basin will rise." I was impressed by this metaphor. Jozsi bacsi was a well-read man and had a lot of books, and he would let me borrow anything I wanted. In particular I remember a recently translated American history of the Second World War. As Jozsi bacsi correctly pointed out to me, this book completely slighted Soviet achievements in defeating the Germans. Nevertheless, it made a great impression on me. I read it with utter absorption, taking pleasure in each Allied victory. When the Fischers' business was nationalized in 1949 they moved to Budapest, and within months they were deported to a distant village. Jozsi bacsi died in that village. Why they of all people got deported is difficult to understand; Communist terror was haphazard.

I also liked Fried Bandi bacsi, a bookkeeper, who had lost his wife and child and lived by himself. He used to take me to soccer games, which I had never seen before. Whenever the local team played against a team from Budapest, I rooted for



the visitors. Another couple, recently married returnees, were the Gatis. They were young, both of them tall and blond, attractive, and not only did not look Jewish, but looked positively aristocratic. I could well imagine him on horseback. Indeed, both of them came from rich families. Laci was a sculptor, with which of course, he could make no money and therefore worked as a bookkeeper. Marika, his wife, whom I liked and admired, for a while gave me English lessons. After we left Szekesfehervar, the Gatis were also deported.

But the family that was closest to us were the Gamses. Magda neni's father had had a shoe factory, and she had grown up in luxury. She attended schools in Switzerland, and spoke French and German. There were Magda neni, her son Jancsi, who was exactly my age and became my best friend, and Vera, her daughter, who was then sixteen and had been hidden by nuns in Budapest during the siege. Neither Magda neni's parents nor her husband returned from Germany, and she was left with the task of taking care of the two children. For a while she was incapable of coping and relatives had to help. For the rest of her days she suffered from a nervous tick. I liked her very much. She was warm and direct, and never exhibited her wounds. She came to adjust to the new circumstances and learned to manage a shoe store that was exactly across the street from mother's store.

People went to each others' houses for coffee and dessert and often played cards. There was not a single non-Jew in this company. It would be difficult even to imagine how a Christian could appear in these circles. First of all, the Christians were either peasants or workers, or, a small group were ex-officers and landowners who formed a social elite. Christians and Jews just did not meet or mix. In any case, at this time the Jews were suspicious of Christians. Once I said to mother that the father of a schoolmate, an army officer, seemed to be a nice man. She responded rather cruelly:

"How do you know that he was not the one who organized the deportations two years ago?"

Although people rarely talked explicitly about their lives in camps, nevertheless the Nazi experience dominated their thoughts, actions, and politics. Being Jewish did not mean a belief in a certain set of laws; it meant above all the memory of Auschwitz. Understandably perhaps, Jews saw around them, whether it was there or not, anti-Semitism. For example newspapers hardly mentioned a small-scale pogrom that occurred in the little town of Kunmadaras in 1946, but Jews everywhere in the country talked about it compulsively. Although I did not know what exactly happened in Kunmadaras, just the word sent a chill down my spine. Mother's friends believed that if you scratched a Christian, any Christian, you would find an anti-Semite. These people learned from the Nazis that Christians and Jews were not supposed to feel comfortable in each other's presence. Mother was the worst. It was not that she looked down on Christians, though she did believe that they were all inclined to drink, and most of them tended to be a little stupid, but she considered it the natural order of things that Jews and Christians kept aloof from one another.

The combination of economic interests and the fear of anti-Semitism produced strange politics. On the one hand, by 1948 it was clear that the new rulers would not tolerate free economic activity for long. Under the circumstances, shopkeepers and tradesmen could not have been enthusiastic about the imposition of a Communist regime. On the other hand—ironically in view of what was going on in the Soviet Union in the late 1940s and early 1950s—the Jews were convinced that



it was only a Communist regime that protected them against the revival of vicious anti-Semitism. In my parents' circles there were only a couple of people who voted for the Communists in 1945 and 1946, but all without exception followed with great enthusiasm the news about the establishment of the state of Israel. Strangely, it was possible to be a Stalinist and a Zionist at the same time.

The immediate postwar years were merely a brief moment, a short interlude between two mad utopias, a time of pathetic attempts by little people to lead normal lives. The evolution of Communist dictatorship was quick. In 1946 and 1947 people expected that a democratic society in which business could exist would flourish, but by 1948 it was clear that this would not happen. This was the time that nationalizations began. Dezso knew that his factory would soon be taken away and therefore took out as much money as he could. What he did with the money and how he hid it I did not understand, but evidently, he did a good job, for we did not become really poor.

On the other hand, mother was surprised when a few months later her store was also taken away. She described how two men with briefcases came into the store, warned her and Ibi to take nothing from the cash register, and announced that from this moment on the store was state property. Next day mother and Ibi were summoned to the offices of the city council and were offered managerial jobs in the store that they had owned. Ibi, who really had no choice, accepted the offer and worked there for a couple of years until the store was closed down, but mother had no interest in such a position. Her business career was over.

In that year most of my mother's friends lost their businesses and livelihoods. Most of them soon found other occupations. Some managed stores that they had previously owned, and others took jobs elsewhere, mostly in the ever growing bureaucracy. Politics once again intruded in daily life. Rumors and horror stories spread, just as in 1944. We did not suddenly become poor: there was plenty of food, and there was no question of dispensing with Annus' services, but the future seemed uncertain. We heard of people, not yet close friends, who were arrested and some who were deported. Friends of my parents simply disappeared and no one would inquire as to what had happened to them. The political police could come for us at any moment. My parents, mother in particular, were afraid.

Only much later did I hear the story of acquaintances of mother, the Grosses. The beginning of that story was not at all unusual, but its conclusion was. Magda had returned from Auschwitz, but her husband and child did not. She then married a man—I forgot his name—who was also a survivor of a camp, and who also had lost his family. For a couple of years they did well: they had a child and their business flourished. Then in 1950 the man was arrested and a couple of months later Magda was also taken by the police. Her husband died in prison and Magda was tortured and was told that she would never see her son again; however, after Stalin's death she was freed. Four decades later, in Sydney, Australia, where she had made a new life for herself and for her son, she met the man who had interrogated her. Now he was a prosperous and by all accounts able dentist. Magda succeeded in getting papers from Hungary that showed that this man, Vajda, another Jew, another survivor of Auschwitz, was the officer who had signed the arrest warrants. She confronted him with the paper that bore his signature. The man quibbled: "How can you say that I had worked for the secret police? Hungary had a political police, but it was not secret at all! In any case, I signed only a few warrants, and only when my boss was away on vacation."

The adults I knew were all Jewish, but I had only a single Jewish friend, Jancsi Gams. He was bound to become my best friend; with no one else did I share a background. We played chess, we quarreled, we hurt each others' feelings. We had serious talks about life, politics, and the future. We were little romantics: we dreamt of the big, outside world. The Gamses had a huge, prewar geography book, immodestly entitled *The World*, which had chapters full of pictures of all countries. We looked at the pictures longingly, imagining ourselves walking the streets of Istanbul or Helsinki. We talked about becoming polar explorers.

He was a livelier child than I. He was always going somewhere on his bicycle. He was on the swimming team and later played the drum in the town orchestra. I was afraid to get on a bicycle and could not possibly have played in the worst orchestra. And while I dreamed of being a champion swimmer, when I listened in 1948 on radio to the wonderful achievements of the Hungarian swimmers at the Olympics, I could not have made the swimming team since I was unable or unwilling to jump into the water head first.

I also got to know other children in our neighborhood, in the swimming pool, where I went almost every day during the summer, and of course in school. It was a mixed company. One of my friends was a tall, swarthy fellow, whom we called Red, the son of the gypsy violinist in the hotel's restaurant. Another was Bajor Pityu, who lived quite near us. He was a short, round-headed boy, whose father owned a pub and a bowling alley. During the day I could try my untalented hands in rolling the enormously heavy black balls. On one occasion, as we walked home from the swimming pool he said:

"The Germans should have won the war. They almost succeeded in making an atom bomb and then they would have won."

"That is out of the question! The Allies were much stronger, and the Germans never had a chance. They could not have possibly won," I said, getting red in the face. I had never had a friend who was on the Germans' side. Then he told me that his grandparents were deported in 1945, as Swabs, the German-speaking minority. It had never occurred to me that people could suffer unjustly as a result of the Russian victory. After this talk Pityu and I played together once in a while—Dezso had bought me a soccer ball, which raised my standing among the boys—but Pityu and I never became close and soon stopped seeing one another altogether.

In school I was painfully aware that I was very different from other children. This sense of being different did not mean that I felt hostile, or perceived hostility from them; it simply meant that my world was separate. I was afraid of other children, as long as they were strangers. When I walked to school, I would go to the other side of the street to avoid boys I did not know. But once a relationship was established, I received from others a bemused tolerance.

In particular, there was one strong, big, and poor boy, Eppeldauer Feri, with whom I had excellent relations. I tutored him, and he gave me protection on a few occasions when it was needed. Usually he came to our house, where we went through the mathematics lessons together, but on occasion I visited his place. He lived in the old part of town. The front of the building had been bombed and you had to go through the rubble in order to get to their miserable quarters. Although it was already a couple of years after the end of the war, the windowpanes had still not been replaced. Two of the three windows were covered with plywood, making the place, during the winter when the windows had to be kept closed, almost completely dark and gloomy. The tiny

rooms smelled of mildew—a sweet, unpleasant and penetrating smell. My image of desperate poverty has always been that depressing apartment.

Especially during the early days, I spent a great deal of time by myself. I solved crossword puzzles and was both proud and amused when at age ten I won a shaving kit. And, of course, I spent a great deal of time reading. I chose the strangest places to read, such as the branch of the walnut tree, or the attic, or on top of a wood pile in the shed. On slow days I could also sit for hours in mother's store with a book. In winter I lay on my bed, placing the book on the floor, and let my head hang down. My reading was haphazard: I read books for children, such as the books of Karl May, but also read my mother's middle-brow books. In particular I remember Cronin, and a tear-jerking novel, called *Sorrell and Son*, which I saw decades later in a dramatized form on Masterpiece Theater. I read with great absorption an old-fashioned, five-volume history of Hungary, published in 1896 for the millenium of the Hungarians' arrival in the Carpathian Basin. These books, bound in beautiful red leather, were full of magnificent illustrations, protected by translucent onionskin. I could rattle off all the names of the many kings of Hungary, starting with Saint Stephen and ending with Charles, the last Hapsburg ruler.

The school I attended was next to the railroad station, a 45-minute walk from our house. I had to leave the house a little after seven each morning, a time when only Annus was up. There were no school buses, so I had to walk in rain or sunshine, in snow or in the summer heat. I spent the long walks daydreaming. I saw myself as a soccer hero. I saw myself most often not kicking the winning goal, but passing it to someone else who would get it through the goal line. I was the organizer, the brain. Nothing could have been less realistic. I lacked the stamina, but above all the coordination to be a decent soccer player, and therefore when teams were chosen in school, I was always the last, or, at best, the next to the last selected. I could never enjoy playing because I was so much afraid that if I missed I would be humiliated. As, indeed, I often was.

At this time in my life I considered the question of the existence of God more often than any other time before or since. Of course, I had never heard of Pascal, but nonetheless inclined toward his view: it was better to believe and be mistaken than the other way around. But in my mind believing in God and being Jewish were two separate matters. My Jewishness was obviously not a matter of choice. It was a given, as my awkward, gangly body was a given. What fool would have chosen it given the times in which I lived? I knew that being Jewish was a burden, but I am not sure that I also recognized that it was also a small blessing, for it gave me a sense of belonging that I overtly rejected, but also unconsciously wanted. But you did not have to believe in God to be Jewish. God really had nothing to do with it.

Jancsi and I had our birthdays only three weeks apart and now our thirteenth birthday was approaching. Our bar-mitzvah would belong not only to Jancsi and me, but to the entire little Jewish community of Szekesfehervar. For the community we represented the next generation. Coming together for the occasion—at a time when the Communist regime pursued increasingly repressive policies, churches and synagogues all over the country were being closed down, religious education excluded from the schools, when Jewish business people were losing their livelihood—the celebration of the bar mitzvah was to be an act of affirmation.

Jancsi and I were compelled to take Hebrew lessons from the Rabbi, Otto Komlos, a dapper little man, and an intellectual. At the time he was a fairly young

man, perhaps in his thirties, and an eligible bachelor. My mother wanted to marry him off to a 20-year-old daughter of a Budapest friend of hers, who came and stayed with us for a couple of weeks. I enjoyed Kati's company, who treated me as an adult and confided her plans, but nothing came of the arrangement. I heard not too long ago that Komlos went to Israel in 1956 and acquired a reputation there as a learned scholar.

Jancsi put a better face on our thrice weekly meetings with the Rabbi than I did. Komlos had a reasonably enlightened attitude to religion and to the world, but had that inevitable corollary of his profession, pious talk. In an oily tone he would say things such as:

"Respect your parents, for that is pleasing to God."

He told us stories from the Bible, which I found amusing enough, and gave us readings about how little children in Israel contributed to the building and defense of the country.

My problem was an absolute inability to learn Hebrew. After some months I could just make out the letters with some difficulty, but the idea of reading something aloud that I did not understand struck me as absurd and I evidently resisted it. The day set for the big occasion was coming nearer, and I could not read a line from the Torah. Finally we reached a compromise. Jancsi alone would read in Hebrew, and I would give a speech to the assembled company in Hungarian. I am sure that this went contrary to religious requirement, but poor Komlos Otto, our Rabbi, ran out of patience with me.

Then I was called to the Torah and I must have mumbled something.

During the long service I remember thinking, "Yes, the Communists are correct, there is no God."

That evening a dinner was given in our honor in the temple. The magnificent synagogue, built in the late nineteenth century that expressed the power, wealth, and self-confidence of the ancient Jewish community of this town, had been blown up by the Nazis. Now the makeshift temple was across the street from the ruins. About a hundred fifty people came, almost the entire Jewish community. Most of them I hardly knew, yet they wanted to come. I loved being the center of attention and was immensely moved. I had my first suit with long pants on and I pulled myself to my feet. I had such stage fright that I tried to lift up the glass of water in front of me to wet my dry mouth, but realized that my hand was shaking so much that the glass would never reach the intended goal. I could recite my memorized words only in a monotone:

"Respect your parents, for that is pleasing to God," I began.

### ***Birkhat Ha-Gomel***

TO THE EDITOR OF JUDAISM:

Rochelle L. Millen's study of *Birkhat Ha-Gomel* (Summer 1994) includes a statement about "the ambivalence—in both modern Orthodox and Conservative synagogues—toward making" the recitation of *birkhat ha-gomel* by women "a usual, accepted part of the communal prayer experience."

It is important to note that the prayer book published by the Conservative rabbinic and congregational organizations (*Siddur Sim Shalom*) assumes that women recite this *berakhah* as an accepted part of the communal prayer experience. On pages 402 and 403 of that prayer book, having survived childbirth is noted as one of the occasions when the *berakhah* is recited, and the Hebrew text of the congregational response includes words in the appropriate gender which apply to women as well as to men.

*Siddur Sim Shalom* was first published in 1985 by The Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

RABBI JULES HARLOW  
New York, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF JUDAISM:

I certainly agree with Professor Millen's call for more women to say *birkhat ha-gomel* aloud in *shul* following childbirth or the other times at which public thanksgiving is demanded. I think, though, that it should be noted that this call can be bracketed away from her interesting proposal for understanding the "cultural context" in which the current practice has evolved.

For example, two leading *Haredi halakhists* who would certainly not identify with her cultural analysis are quite supportive of this procedure. Rabbi Moshe Sternbach, Vice President of the Eida Haredit in Jerusalem, and Rabbi

Ovadia Yosef,<sup>1</sup> perhaps the leading contemporary Sephardic *posek*, both note with approval that it is the long-standing and widely practiced custom in Jerusalem for women to recite *birkhat ha-gomel* aloud from the women's section at the time the Torah is read.

Both also endorse her saying *birkhat ha-gomel* at a specially convened public celebration at home. It is instructive to note R. Yosef's quick dismissal of possible objections. The fact that she might still be *nidda* after childbirth is irrelevant; *nidda* status is no impediment to entering the synagogue or reciting *berakhot*. There is nothing immodest in her public recitation, because it is the halakha which requires the *berakha* to be said in front of a *minyan*. There is no issue of *kol isha* or sexual arousal caused by her presence, because the *Shekhina* Herself is attendant with the *minyan*, and there is no sexual arousal in the company of the *Shekhina*; indeed, "the evil inclination is not to be found for such a short matter . . . especially nowadays when women regularly go out to public places among men . . ." (This, he notes, is the source some use to allow men and women to sit together and sing *zemirot*.) Originally, women could be called to read the Torah; the reason they are not called at this time is *kavod hatsibbur*, not fear of arousal or *kol isha*. Thus, he concludes, "everyone concedes (*lekhoh hadeiot*) that a woman may say *birkhat ha-gomel* in this manner."

While there is certainly some appeal to women saying *birkhat ha-gomel* in *shul* as do the men, we should not be so quick to question the preferability of their saying it at a home celebration following childbirth. There is little focus on the people who say the quick *berakha* in *shul*. While the *berakha* is recited at the time of the Torah reading, many men who say it do not have an *aliya*.<sup>2</sup> They rather step forward for a moment—as do the women—

say the *berakha* and return to their seats. Saying *birkhat ha-gomel* as part of the home celebration—a *brit* or *simhat bat*—allows for more focus on the *simha*.

To be sure, examining the contemporary meaning of “*Kol kevuda bat melekh penima* (All glory to the King’s daughter within the place)” (Ps. 45:15) is important.<sup>3</sup> But it is also important to keep in mind that contemporary halakhists do not necessarily see any contradiction between maintaining a traditional view of women’s role and their reciting *birkhat ha-gomel* aloud in *shul* at the time of the Torah reading.

JOEL WOLOWELSKY  
Brooklyn, New York

#### NOTES

1. R. Moshe Sternbach, *Responsa Teshuvot veHanhagot* (Jerusalem, 5746 [1986]), no. 195, p. 72. R. Ovadia Yosef, *Responsa Yehave Da-at*, part 4 (Jerusalem, 5741 [1981]), no. 15, pp. 75–79.

2. It is therefore surprising that Millen relates (n. 35) that some Conservative rabbis do not have women recite *birkhat ha-gomel* because there are not enough *aliyot* to go around.

3. This is one of the questions addressed in the “Symposium on Women and Jewish Education,” *Tradition* 28:3, Spring 1994, pp. 5–38.

ROCHELLE L. MILLEN *replies*:

My thanks to Rabbi Harlow for bringing to the attention of the readers of *JUDAISM* the innovation of Siddur Sim Shalom in noting *birkhat ha-gomel* as appropriate for women after childbirth, and even printing the response in feminine form. The decision to design the Rabbinical Assembly Siddur in this way will help work towards the goal of making *birkhat ha-gomel* for women a more usual and accepted practice in Conservative congregations than it is today.

Dr. Wolowelsky writes that support for women’s recitation of *birkhat ha-gomel*

by contemporary halakhic authorities should be seen as independent from the “cultural context” I describe in which current practice has developed. On the contrary, however, the very evidence marshaled by Dr. Wolowelsky sustains my claim that “cultural context” and “deeply ingrained societal attitudes” remain proactive in the continued theoretical and practical aspects of discussions of women in contemporary responsa. Why else, in responsa published in 1986 and 1981, respectively, would Rabbis Sternbach and Ovadia Yosef have yet again to reiterate that which is perfectly clear from many earlier responsa (as cited, for example, in my article)? That is, the category of *nidda* is not relevant; immodesty is not a factor, nor is *kol isha*; male sexual arousal is not pertinent.<sup>1</sup> R. Sternbach and Rav Ovadia are responding to questions asked of them because women reciting *birkhat ha-gomel* remains an unusual practice and adherents of halakhah are even now concerned about these issues. Were it to be the “widespread custom,” as Wolowelsky claims, for women in Jerusalem “to recite the *birkhat ha-gomel* aloud from the women’s section at the time the Torah is read,” surely by 1981 and 1986—and today in 1995—religious women would be familiar with the “how” and “what” of such recitation. In fact, my informal but widespread Jerusalem poll, as well as more structured sociological studies bear out the assertion that this is not the case.

Dr. Wolowelsky’s brief discussion of women saying *birkhat ha-gomel* at home makes at least two unwarranted assumptions, while in reality not engaging my analysis of “cultural context.” First, he assumes the “preferability” of women’s recitation at home, although he has just cited support for the presumably “widespread” practice of women’s recitation of *birkhat ha-gomel* taking place in *shul* dur-



ing the reading of the Torah. Does this mean that in Jerusalem women primarily say *birkhat ha-gomel* in *shul* while observant women elsewhere prefer the home as the more appropriate setting? In addition, it is quite odd to belittle the saying of *birkhat ha-gomel* in *shul* as having "little focus"; certainly one might also *daven* more slowly and in a more focused manner at home. This does not erase the halakhic preference for *tefillah betzibbur* and *kedushat beit hakneset*. Also to be considered is that many *shuls* are not to adopt a metaphor-friendly to women, except perhaps to prepare the kiddush.

Wolowelsky's surprise, as expressed in his footnote 2, is itself surprising. That *birkhat ha-gomel* can be recited at the time of the Torah reading without an aliyah doesn't mean that is usually the case (it isn't) and doesn't pertain to my citation regarding Conservative *shuls*, in which circumstances, *shul* appropriateness and halakhic knowledge among congregants are not the same as in a Young Israel or Agudah *shul* in Brooklyn.

Wolowelsky concludes that "contemporary halakhists do not necessarily see any contradiction between maintaining a traditional view of women's role and their reciting *birkhat ha-gomel* aloud in *shul* at the time of the Torah reading." That is, the contradiction is not a necessary, logical implication of God-fearing women insisting on this recitation. But the contradiction is there, and continued discussion in the responsa literature testifies to the longstanding ambivalence of the religious community towards women's increasingly public role, especially in the religious sphere.

While I appreciate Dr. Wolowelsky's comments, it must be noted that his articles on related areas<sup>2</sup> serve to confirm the strong and necessary connection between "cultural context" and the responsa literature.

#### NOTES

1. See however the responsum of R. Chaim David Halevi, in regard to sexual arousal and Kaddish as quoted in Rochelle L. Millen, "Women and Kaddish: Reflections on Responsa," *Modern Judaism* 10, May 1990, p. 1908 and footnote 17, p. 202.

2. For instance, "The Eating Fellowship: An Exploration," *Tradition* 16:3, Spring 1977; "Modern Orthodoxy and Women's Changing Self-Perception," *Tradition* 22:1, Spring 1986; Letter to the Editor, *Hadarom* 57, 5748/1988; "Women's Participation in Sheva Berakhot," *Modern Judaism* 19 (1992).



#### *Glimpsing Golus in the Golden Land*

TO THE EDITOR OF JUDAISM:

I found myself increasingly irritated as I read Michael Galchinsky's article, "Glimpsing Golus in the Golden Land" (Fall 1994), or, "Now We're Victims of Multiculturalist Ideologies." At first I thought it was due to the historical inaccuracies (Napoleon's bargain was actually hammered out by the Revolution's Constituent Assembly well before Napoleon appeared on the scene; he actually rolled back some of the freedoms offered to the French Jews). Then I took exception to the way he imposed the American metaphor of the melting pot on to the very different experiences of other Western diasporas. (I know from personal experience that the French Jews never felt that "melting" was an option for them.) Finally I realized that my irritation stemmed most fundamentally from the fact that my fellow middle-class American Jew was moaning about how he is still victimized under the new academic dispensation.

Now I myself have had some familiarity with politically correct discrimination, as I happen to belong to not one but two under-appreciated minorities: gays and Jews. As it happens, I look and talk like a middle-class white male, which is one reason I was never able to secure a posi-



tion in the university as a specialist in Black and African literatures. Any positions that I applied for were naturally filled, in descending order of desirability, by 1) a female minority, 2) a male minority, 3) a white female, 4) position left vacant for readvertisement. I was a classic victim of reverse discrimination. Poor me. And yet, I still was able to buy a house in the Bay Area because my middle-class Jewish family had the money and social standing to assure me a mortgage loan. Now, under the peculiar conditions of multiculturalism in academia, I would have rocketed to fame and fortune if I had been a real minority member, but, in the mainstream culture where whiteness and class standing still pack a punch, I feel better off as a Jew. However, if I'm looking for a victim role for myself, I find the gay one—with fag-bashing and the acceptability of homophobia in social discourse—to be far more compelling than the Jewish one. Does Dr. Galchinsky really worry that increased hostility from the international community toward Israel threatens him as an American Jew? Is his heart really ablaze with Jewish fear? He wouldn't last five minutes as a Black in America.

I do not mean to trivialize the instances of anti-Semitism Dr. Galchinsky cites from personal experience. It's just that our European import is so pale in its perversion when compared to our rich national tradition of good old color prejudice.

So we're too white and middle-class to be included in the hierarchy of victimization? Gee, too bad. Maybe we should cop to the fact that American Jews have fared pretty well in twentieth-century America. And, finally, who says you have to be a victim to join the multicultural salad bowl? "Jews are not part of the multiculturalist coalition," Dr. Galchinsky writes. Why? Because

Gloria Anzaldúa and the MLA won't give us ideological acceptance or our own discussion group? If Dr. Galchinsky wants to claim multiculturalism as an inclusionary ideology rather than as a "hierarchy of oppressions," he needn't let Gloria Anzaldúa or Leonard Jeffries stop him. He gives them too much power when he allows them to define the term in a way that makes him feel excluded. If we want to empower ourselves as Jews, then we need to do our work and explore our path without outside validation.

DR. ROBERT PHILIPSON  
*Oakland, California*

MICHAEL GALCHINSKY *replies:*

Dr. Philipson's letter makes some valuable points. In particular, he disagrees with the emphasis toward the end of my essay on Jews' victimization. He doesn't say, but might have, that in its polemic ire, the essay plays the very game it criticizes multiculturalism for playing: victim oneupsmanship. I agree with this criticism—the hierarchy of oppressions is unproductive if the goal is to build coalitions among progressives. This is perhaps the result of writing quickly and in frustration. *Je m'accuse.*

But Dr. Philipson's letter acknowledges only this strain in the essay. The essay is in profound agreement with Dr. Philipson that Jews in the United States (at least the vast majority) have white skin and socioeconomic privilege. Certainly this makes Jews different from those in the multiculturalist coalition who suffer the consequences of not having such privilege. But by focusing exclusively on Jews' privilege, multiculturalists have too often missed the ways in which progressive Jews can be useful partners in many multiculturalist dialogues and political projects. For instance, Anzaldúa—whose groundbreaking and masterful work I would not consider in

the same breath with Leonard Jeffries' myths and lies except that both consider Jews outside the pale of their discussion—Anzaldúa might have pointed out the many fruitful areas of overlap in the experiences of Jews and “people of color.” Jews and groups of color share experiences of diaspora, of multilingualism, of neglect in the canon, of immigration and acculturation, of strivings for religious pluralism, of intergenerational differences—and the list goes on. In all these areas Jews might make substantial contributions to study and debate.

The point here is not for Jews to get “validation from others,” as Dr. Philipson seems to think. The point is simultaneously more practical and more constructive: it is to build strategic time-limited and goal-oriented coalitions for the purpose of doing *tikkun olam*. Multiculturalism has encouraged the development of an “identity politics” that in the 80s and 90s has seen the splintering of the left into smaller and smaller factions of more highly specified identity groups. The overemphasis on “difference” and on victimization has made bridge-building a difficult endeavor, to say the least. But such bridges are all the more necessary in an era in which the forces of anti-democratic elitism and compassion-lessness seem to be in the ascendant. Not only multi-culturalists but Jews also need to focus on bridge-building because we are in the vulnerable and tricky position of being neither white nor people of color, but having one foot in and one foot out of both worlds. My essay was an attempt to point out that Jews should desire and work for a better multiculturalism, one that struggles against its own tendency to make oversimplified hierarchies and exclusions, to its own detriment and that of the groups like Jews it excludes.

### *Rashi's Sister*

TO THE EDITOR OF JUDAISM:

The Fall 1994 issue of JUDAISM is very different. My students always tell me “to lighten up”—well, JUDAISM has lightened up—the use of a photo, and the reproductions of Kitaj make the issue so much less “formidable.” And, on a personal level, I was happy to see poetry and the difficulties of its translation in the Celan article. Even humor: Rashi's sister! (“Sarah's Silence” by Dvora Yanow) Are you familiar with Robert Graves' essay in which he attributes the *Odyssey* to Homer's DAUGHTER?!

I thought Dvora Yanow might be interested in the enclosed poem by Benjamin Galai, which I translated—it appeared in *Modern Hebrew Poetry* (Iowa, 1980). It shows that the silence of Sarah has preoccupied poets even before Rashi's sister's commentary was “discovered.”

#### THE DAYS OF SARAH

And the days  
of Sarah were  
one hundred years, and twenty, and seven.

And she died—  
she vanished from the world on Mt. Hebron,  
to the sound of the pattering feet of servants  
whose very names she had forgotten.  
All the family friends accompanied,  
shouldered her coffin  
to its last resting place.  
Its boards, it was said, were of the very  
thinnest,  
ever so light.

And the days  
of Sarah were  
one hundred years, and twenty, and seven.  
These were the days of Sarah.

Yet in truth her candle was snuffed many,  
many days before  
she came to her last rest in the earth.  
And the coffin in which she lay had been  
made all those years  
out of the memory of split logs on another  
mountain,  
on another mountain, in the Land of Moriah.

BENJAMIN GALAI

I conclude with a question: If JUDAISM can publish pictures, might it not publish short fiction from time to time?

Congratulations on your first "baby"; may there be many more.

BERNHARD FRANK  
*Buffalo, New York*

TO THE EDITOR OF JUDAISM:

I thought the enclosed midrash, "An Eternal Triangle," might respond to issues raised by Dvora Yanow's fine essay, "Sarah's Silence."

#### AN ETERNAL TRIANGLE

The term "your slave" used in verse 12 appears with a personal possessive pronoun indicating a relationship between Abraham and Hagar. It is the only time this possession is indicated; every other time Hagar is referred to (Genesis Chapter 16, verses 1, 3, 5, 6, 8 and Chapter 19, verses 9, 10, and 13) she is known as the Egyptian slave or as Sarah's maidservant.

Based on the change in the possessive pronoun when applied to Hagar, an idea arises concerning the triangular relationship in the narrative of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar. . . .

In the light of day Sarah will tell Abraham to cast away his maidservant and her son. She tells herself this is for the good of the nation promised to Abraham by his God. Are they not to be as numerous as the grains of desert sand, as many as the heavenly stars? She tells herself it is God's will. She tells herself she will help Abraham understand it is *her* son, her only son, the one whom he must love, Yitzhak, who will carry the seed of the promise forward.

Still, she cannot rest. What kind of woman chases out another woman, and her child, into the wilderness? What kind of a woman severs the bonds with such a sharp sword? What kind of woman has she become, so utterly removed from her mother's house, so tied to the old man and his God that she will turn her back on the hospitality laws of the desert?

Sarah, the old woman, mother of a nation, has no answers. She only reads the signs as they come up from the center of her being. She knows she must discard doubt, bury her questions, and act as his God wishes.

And so this day, Sarah planted the seeds of enmity, forever to sprout in the dry desert, needing only tears to bring forth green shoots. Another inheritance for the two sons of Abraham.

Hagar wept tears gathered by the angels and made sweet as well water to give to her son on the day she was banished by Abraham.

Sarah's tears flowed without cease, the laughter of her son silenced on the day he returned from the mountain. And she remained without comfort until the day of her death.

NECHAMA TAMLER  
*Palo Alto, California*

TO THE EDITOR OF JUDAISM:

With all due respect to Rashi's sister and to her pathfinding concern for women's issues, we must consider other explanations for Sarah's not being mentioned in the Akedah narrative.

Midrashic tradition is correspondingly silent about Sarah's role. One Midrash attributes her death to a "leak" by Satan of the event of the Akedah—we sense that she was left with the impression that a sacrifice took place.

I would like to suggest other scenarios (perhaps what Rashi's sister had in mind for the continuation that did not reach us). We know a great deal about what the arrival of a child does to family dynamics. We know something of the way guilt affects people. We know a bit about how a father looks at a child who is the cause of loss of a mother. We understand something about postpartum depression. We can only guess at the effect pregnancy, childbirth, nursing (and weaning) have on a ninety-year-old woman.

Let us put ourselves in the mind of Sarah and of Abraham. Consider the possibilities:

(1) Sarah never recovered emotionally from her ordeal. We never hear from her after her outburst which led to the separation of Ishmael and Hagar from the household. She retrogressed

by degrees from the maturity of age ninety through the exuberance of motherhood to a childish state. Abraham, in essence, did not have Sarah to consult with.

(2) The banishment reconsidered: Sarah, when she realized what it meant to her husband to cast off his first-born son (note Genesis 17:18 "O that Ishmael might live by your favor") silenced herself. Overcome by guilt at what she had required Abraham to do she simply never again told him what to do—or not to do.

(3) The effect on Sarah physically: pregnancy and childbirth consumed her remaining physical resources. Abraham (rightly or wrongly) stopped burdening her with requests for advice. Midrashic tradition is consistent with a picture of Sarah dying.

(4) Inside Abraham: In his mind, long before the birth of Isaac, he had adjusted to Ishmael being his heir. Isaac's birth destroyed the status quo to which the household (including Sarah!) had accommodated. G-d now says: Give Isaac back; Abraham says: Take him!

(5) Within Abraham's heart: The one person I have loved above the whole world is Sarah. The birth of Isaac robbed me of my wife, my love. I *have* to love him; he *is* my son. But he is the one whose birth, in reality, took away my Sarah. That was the Divine Will, and I accepted it. Now the Divine Will comes with another demand; I accept it—and concur in the judgment. Perhaps I can now go on to bringing Ishmael back into my household (especially if Sarah is beyond being upset!).

Sarah would have been unhinged by the sight of Harar's teenage son, "acting as a member of the family," playing with *her* son. Also, feeling some guilt over what she made Abraham do to Ishmael—his first-born son!

Now the test: Sarah, in her mind, if she knew, was still not sure she wanted this

son. More to the point, Abraham was woefully ambivalent. So G-d now belatedly, agrees to his request of Gen. 17:18—if only Ishmael could be favorable in Your sight.

SEYMOUR M. PANITZ  
*Rockville, Maryland*

DVORA YANOW *replies:*

"Rashi's sister," like "Shakespeare's sister," was intended to prod questioning about voices and experiences that may have been lost, in history, literature (including commentaries), and daily practices of organizational and communal life and leadership. To the extent that the midrash encourages others to engage in making these silences speak, it will have succeeded. We are all the richer, as is our understanding of the text, for hearing the varied lived experiences brought to bear on the *pshat*. One of the questions that might be raised, for example, is what rabbis can do, in congregations, Hillel positions, administrative roles, and other capacities, to bring out the voices and experiences of girls and women in their respective institutions. For instance, Rabbi Melanie Aron of Congregation Shir Hadash, Los Gatos, California, convenes a monthly study group on women in the Bible that draws over 40 women from 30 to 80 years old, and I have been delighted to hear the commentaries created and questions raised by women who have lived longer years and different lives than I have. Related to this is the matter of professional education: what changes might the seminaries make in their curricula to make heard the voices and experiences not only of increasing numbers of women in rabbinical training, but also of girls and women in Hebrew school classrooms and as congregants, not to mention male seminarians' wives?

One reading of Benjamin Galai's poem, here in translation by Bernhard

Frank, is in keeping with rabbinic commentary that explains not only Sarah's subsequent death but also her absence from the text because of shock ensuing from knowledge of the intended sacrifice. From Sarah's point of view we might imagine what transpired: Did Abraham tell her his intentions? Did they argue? Did he provoke her? Did she die a spiritual death 30-some years before her physical death because of Abraham's intentions with respect to her/their son, or because of his treatment of her, or both? The poet leaves these parts of the midrash to our imaginings.

Nechama Tamler, in explaining the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, notes Sarah's profound, deathly sadness not only with respect to Isaac's near death, but also in face of her displacement by Hagar in Abraham's affections (and perhaps also, she suggests, for causing eternal grief between the boys' descendants). Although she doesn't address Sarah's silence on *akedah* plans, Ms. Tamler does suggest some further dimensions to what might have been Sarah's experience of life events at the time.

Seymour Panitz has mis-read my intentions if he understands me to be proposing the definitive explanation of Sarah's silence. My intentions have been no greater (and, indeed, by volume and scholarly range considerably less) than those captured by Shalom Spiegel in his title *Me-agadot ha'akedah* (*The Last Trial*, NY: Schocken, 1969). Calling attention to the first syllable of the title, Judah Goldin noted in his introduction that Professor Spiegel intended to address part of the extensive lore that had grown up around the *akedah* text. So, too, I proposed to raise a question and suggest one avenue of thought, not to imply that this was the sole answer. And so I welcome other attempts to explain

Sarah's silence and to account for her experience of the events in her voice. Rabbi Panitz has sketched some avenues for doing so; other parts of his explanations speak from Abraham's experience.

It is not clear which "ordeal" Rabbi Panitz thinks Sarah never recovered from emotionally: expelling Hagar, childbirth or one of its attendant life passages, Abraham's treatment of her regarding the *akedah*, the *akedah* itself? Each suggests a range of possible emotional responses and extents of severity. Introducing the possibility of emotional illness as the reason for the breakdown of family ties and, subsequently, of communication certainly raises many avenues to explore concerning family silences and the community's response to such illness. Eli interpreted Hannah's praying as her drunken mumbling to herself; could it also have been a manifestation of emotional illness or distress? Could this be another reason why the two *parshiyot* are brought together as co-readings?

Rabbi Panitz also has Sarah putting aside her own feelings, including, perhaps, those suggested in Nehama Tamler's midrash, in favor of Abraham's. More needs to be explored here: Is she silencing herself out of compassion for him? in confusion? out of a desire for revenge? A clinical psychologist once commented that Jews often use silence as a weapon. This would be a provocative explanation of Sarah's silence and provide an ur-text for contemporary American Jewish behavioral traits. In doing so, however, such a midrash makes us attend to the cost in emotional health to the woman who silences her own feelings in deference to her husband's.

Another possibility seeks to account not only for Sarah's silence, but also her unexplained death immediately follow-

ing the *akedah* events. If Sarah gave birth at 90 and died at 127, that would make for a terribly prolonged post-birth physical or emotional trauma. But one need not link her death to birthing difficulties to pursue this line of thought. Old age suffices as an explanation: she is ill, perhaps delirious, hearing the sounds of voices and wood-chopping around her in confusion. Semiconscious, however, of what is transpiring, she holds on long enough to acknowledge—again, subconsciously—Abraham’s return (although Isaac is not heard from here again); and then she dies. Parts of such an explanation were suggested by Amy Sporer Schiff in a midrash for the Los Gatos study group.

Even more intriguing to me is the psychological dimension of Rabbi Panitz’s second and third possibilities. We might speculate that some form of depression afflicted Sarah and that she came to reject Isaac some time after expelling Hagar and Ishmael. This could be explained as delayed and displaced guilt feelings, but it’s not the only possibility. After all, if she is capable of sending one son away, why not a second one? And so she turns from Abraham and Isaac, both, into silence.

But let us also consider a counter-argument. We know, unfortunately, more and more that family members are often aware, however tacitly, of incestuous acts performed by siblings, parents, uncles, and others “acting as members of the family” (in Rabbi Panitz’s phrase); and that they are silent about these acts. Far from condemning Sarah for having Hagar and Ishmael evicted, we should applaud her for speaking up after seeing the older son “playing with” the younger boy (with all the sexual innuendo of Rabbi Panitz’s emphasis and traditional commentators’ debate). I would also

note that it is not entirely in keeping with the *psbat* of the text to say that Sarah “made” Abraham evict them. God seems to “take the blame” for this one directly: “*shma b’kolah*,” Abraham is told.

Others have also attempted to give Sarah voice. Dr. David Parry, a scholar of medieval theater, notes that several of the “mystery plays” enacted by guilds in the 15th–17th centuries on the continent and in Britain scripted speeches for Sarah. Helen Vogel Yanow calls to my attention Burton L. Vistotsky’s *Reading the Book: Making the Bible a Timeless Text*, in which he mentions a Greek liturgical poet, Romanos, who “melodiously gives Sarah back her voice” in several speeches.

Other Biblical women’s silences have also been noted. For example, Idit Klein (in the Yale Jewish student quarterly *Urim v’Tumim* 7:2, Winter 1992) shows how the text of Samuel II silences Tamar. Again, a medieval playwright, Tirso de Molina, gives her dialogue in his 17th century play *The Rape of Tamar*.

In his 1992 Rosh Hashana sermon Professor Howard Eilberg-Schwartz imagines an exchange of letters between Abraham and Isaac. Can we write letters or dialogues for Sarah and Abraham, Sarah and Isaac, even Sarah and Hagar, or monologues that give sound and substance to Sarah’s voice? In doing so, we might also give greater sound to contemporary women within Judaism, not only liturgically and ritually, but also within the home, the family, and the community and its various institutions. In this fashion we might begin to counter what Andrea Dworkin called, in a recent article in *Ms. Magazine*, the “conceptual silence” of women in Judaism.

•



### ***Reading JUDAISM***

TO THE EDITOR OF JUDAISM:

For more than twenty-five years of active involvement with the AJ Congress, JUDAISM has been my most stimulating Jewish companion, provocative but unpretentious, demanding but comprehensible, bound in tradition but pointed to the future: a welcome interlude to sleepless nights. Welcome to my psychic home! Your first visit (Fall 1994) was a resounding success, not unobtrusive, but polite nonetheless, respectful of the forms of customary address while promising to open up new ideas and modes of communication. What more can I say than to tell you I look forward to your next visit.

My surprise and delight at your first issue as the new editor of JUDAISM was enhanced by the unexpected news that this sophisticated effort (forgive my provincialism) emanated from Santa Cruz. My 31-year-old single son has been living and working and windsurfing in your community for some four years and for all we can tell it will be his permanent abode. Other than the Santa Cruz Haggadah, we have not been able to discern that it contained a semblance of a significant Jewish presence, a commentary both on the distancing of this child from things Jewish as well as the notion that we modern Jews only inhabit psychological space, *shtetls* of the mind: not true, but close enough to rid me of any guilt that Israel can't trade Holy Land for peace or that this son would be more Jewish in Crown Heights. Yet, it is comforting to these Jewish parents to

know that we can tell him he has landed—inadvertently or not—in a hot-bed of Jewish intellectual and communal fervor. Thanks for that. We will make the most of it when we make Seder with him and his brother, sister-in-law, and nephew (our first grandchild, due in a few days in San Francisco) in his home in Santa Cruz in April.

For what it is worth, let me tell you what worked especially well for me in your first issue. The John Felstiner and Clive Sinclair pieces overshadowed all else (though the poetry of Bernhard Frank and Leora Smith shared some of the virtues that marked the essays). They both mated personal experience to detached observation, resulting in charged memoirs of author and subject. These were not subjects in which the authors were merely interested, but intensely engaged.

For myself the analytic journalism of Black Anti-Semitism and Jews and Multiculturalism, interesting and well done in their own right, but well trod subjects, couldn't compete (though I well understand the editing decisions to feature them). At the other extreme, at least for this recovering Jewish chauvinist, Dvora Yanow's cutesy send-up fell flat. Use of the midrashic form to service political agendas abuses the traditional text and doesn't persuade to the underlying message. Instead I was offended by the satiric tool rather than being educated by it. My attitudes can be changed, less heavy-handed weapons will do the trick. Keep trying . . .

JOEL H. LEVY

*Chavy Chase, Maryland*



DISCOVER

# CONGRESS MONTHLY

And enhance your understanding of Jewish life

CONGRESS MONTHLY, the journal of the American Jewish Congress, is a leading source of informed opinion about significant developments in Jewish life. Now in its 61st year of publication, CONGRESS MONTHLY appears 6 times a year. It continues to treat and comment on virtually all of the issues of concern to the Jewish community—political, social, and cultural; Israel; U.S. and international affairs. Its distinguished contributors constitute a virtual “Who’s Who” of the Jewish intellectual community throughout the world.

-----  
*Mail Coupon to:*

CONGRESS MONTHLY  
15 East 84th Street  
New York, NY 10028

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please enclose a check with your choice of:

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> One year .....    | \$12.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Two years .....   | \$24.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Three years ..... | \$35.00 |

U.S. currency only; outside U.S., \$2.00 extra per year.

**WJK  
TITLES**

# WOMEN & RELIGION



*New in the Gender and the Biblical Tradition series—*

## From Eve to Esther

Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women

Leila Leah Bronner Paper \$18.99

Bronner maps the attitude of the ancient rabbis to some of the most significant feminine figures in the Hebrew Bible. She traces the biblical stories and discusses how original intentions were altered when the women in them were subjected to the unique exegetical technique of midrash. "This book is original and well worth presenting."—*Dr. Tan Ilan, Research Associate and Visiting Lecturer, Harvard Divinity School*



*Also available in the series—*

## Far More Precious than Jewels

Perspectives on Biblical Women

Katheryn Pfisterer Darr Paper \$15.99



## Her Image of Salvation

Female Saviors and Formative Christianity

Gail Paterson Corrington Paper \$19.99



## Let the Oppressed Go Free

Feminist Perspectives on the New Testament

Luise Schottroff Paper \$17.99

## No Longer Be Silent

First Century Jewish Portraits of Biblical Women

Cheryl Anne Brown Paper \$17.99



*Also of interest—*

## The Women's Bible Commentary

Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, Editors

Cloth \$23.00

"An undeniable landmark in the 3,000-plus-year history of Judeo-Christian religion."—*Harvard Divinity Bulletin*



**WESTMINSTER  
JOHN KNOX PRESS**

At your bookstore, or call toll-free 1-800-227-2872  
100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396

WJK  
TITLES

# JEWISH/CHRISTIAN RELATIONS



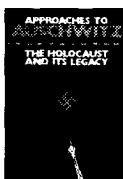
## Mother of the Wire Fence

Inside and Outside the Holocaust

Karl A. Plank Paper \$16.99 November

Plank explores the boundaries that lie between those outside and inside the experience of the Holocaust. Using a poignant photograph of a mother separated from her son by barbed wire as a catalyst, Plank studies the power of poetry, artifact, memory, and religious symbol to respond to the Holocaust's shattering of human connection. "He has taken us close to the inside."—Michael Berenbaum, Georgetown University

Also available—



## Approaches to Auschwitz

The Holocaust and Its Legacy

Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth  
Paper \$18.99 Cloth \$20.00



## Christian Faith in Dark Times

Theological Conflicts in the Shadow of Hitler

Jack Forstman Cloth \$23.00



## Ending Auschwitz

The Future of Jewish and Christian Life

Marc H. Ellis Paper \$16.99



## Facing the Abusing God

A Theology of Protest

David R. Blumenthal Paper \$22.99

## A Guest in the House of Israel

Post-Holocaust Church Theology

Clark M. Williamson Paper \$19.99

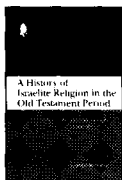


WESTMINSTER  
JOHN KNOX PRESS

At your bookstore, or call toll-free 1-800-227-2872  
100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396

**WJK  
TITLES**

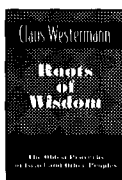
## OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES



### **A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, Volume I From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy**

Rainer Albertz Cloth \$32.00

This is a comprehensive history of Israel and Judah from the earliest discernible beginnings to Hellenistic times. It chronicles the history of Israel and Judah in light of the religions of the ancient Near East and Israelite social history.



### **A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, Volume II From the Exile to the Maccabees**

Rainer Albertz Cloth \$32.00

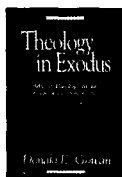
This much-anticipated second volume begins at the period of the exile and carries the investigation of Israelite religion to the period of the Maccabean revolt. Scholarly and wide-ranging, this study concentrates on a period given less prominence in other studies of Israelite religion.

### **Roots of Wisdom**

The Oldest Proverbs of Israel and Other Peoples

Claus Westermann Paper \$19.99

"What one has in this volume is a concise presentation of the different understandings of the major issues in proverb studies, with judicious assessments leading to carefully defended positions."—*Leo G. Perdue*



### **Theology in Exodus**

Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary

Donald E. Gowan Cloth \$28.00

Gowan traces the major affirmations about God found in Exodus through the rest of scripture and into the theologies of Judaism and Christianity. This book "offers a master class in theological exegesis that is original in conception and richly fruitful in execution." —*J. Gerald Janzen*



### **The Lord Reigns**

A Theological Handbook to the Psalms

James L. Mays Paper \$16.99

Mays offers a way to better understand the relationship between God and creation by addressing the importance of the language associated with the reign of God as expressed in the Psalms.

Also available from WJK Press—

### **The Life of Moses**

The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers

John Van Seters Cloth \$32.00

### **Out of the Depths**

The Psalms Speak for Us Today

Bernhard W. Anderson Paper \$12.99



**WESTMINSTER  
JOHN KNOX PRESS**

At your bookstore, or call toll-free 1-800-227-2872  
100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396

## OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

### **The Jews in the History of England, 1485-1850**

DAVID S. KATZ  
*Tel-Aviv University*

In this extensively researched book David S.

Katz examines topics that until now have gone unexplored; such as the Jewish advocates of Henry VIII's divorce and the Jewish conspirators of Elizabethan England. This history of the Jews in England will be essential reading for those interested in English and Jewish history alike.

1994 472 pp.; illus. \$62.00



### **Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature**

DAVID KRAEMER  
*Jewish Theological Seminary*

David Kraemer examines classical Jewish literature to see how Rabbis answered questions arising from the existence of suffering. The many and varied responses to events such as the defeat of Palestine by Rome and the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem are as relevant as ever to the theological controversy surrounding the problem of suffering.

1994 288 pp. \$49.95

### **Studies in Contemporary Jewry Volume X: Reshaping the Past: Jewish History and the Historians**

Edited by JONATHAN FRANKEL  
*Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

This brilliant collection of essays examines the dialogue between Jewish history and historiography in terms of changing national and popular myths, folk memory, and historical consciousness of Jews in modern times.

1994 384 pp. \$45.00

### **Fundamentalism and Gender**

Edited by JOHN STRATTON HAWLEY  
*Barnard College, Columbia University*

"This book goes farther than any other source I know in establishing the centrality of gender issues for present day fundamentalist groups throughout the world."—Lewis V. Baldwin, *Vanderbilt University*.

1994 232 pp. paper \$14.95 cloth \$42.00

**Winner of the National Jewish Book Award  
for Jewish History**

### **The Making of the Jewish Middle Class**

**Women, Family, and Identity in  
Imperial Germany**

MARION A. KAPLAN  
*City University of New York*

"A pathbreaking contribution...significantly deepens our understanding of Jewish history, women's history, and German history...Dramatically reshapes the way we understand the German-Jewish past."—*American Historical Review*. (*Studies in Jewish History*)

1991 (paper 1994) 368 pp.; illus.  
paper \$15.95 cloth \$45.00

### **The Berlin Jewish Community**

**Enlightenment, Family and Crisis,  
1770-1830**

STEVEN M. LOWENSTEIN  
*University of Judaism, Los Angeles*

This original and imaginative book connects intellectual and political transformation with the social structures and daily activities of the Jewish community. Steven M. Lowenstein has used extraordinarily rich documentation to assemble a collective biography of the entire community of Berlin Jews.

(*Studies in Jewish History*)

1994 320 pp.; illus. \$49.95

*Prices are subject to change and  
apply only in the U.S. For order information  
please call 1-800-451-7556.*

200 MADISON AVENUE • NEW YORK, NY 10016

# JUDAISM

Kiss me, make me drunk with your kisses!

Your sweet loving  
is better than wine.

You are fragrant,  
you are myrrh and aloes.  
All the young women want you.

Take me by the hand, let us run together!

My lover, my king, has brought me into his chambers.  
We will laugh, you and I, and count  
each kiss,  
better than wine.

Every one of them wants you.

*The Song of Songs:  
A New Translation*  
by Ariel Bloch & Chana Bloch  
Chapter 1:2-4

יִשְׁכְּנִי מִנְשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ  
כִּי טוֹבִים דְּדִיד מִיַּיִן:  
לְרִיחַ שְׁמָנִיד טוֹבִים  
שֶׁמֶן חֹרֶק שְׁמָד  
עַל־כֵּן עֲלָמוֹת אֲהַבִּיד:  
מִשְׁכְּנִי אֲחִירִיד נְרוּצָה  
הִבִּיאֵנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו  
נִגְלָה וְנִשְׁמָחָה בְּךָ  
נִזְכְּרָה דְּדִיד מִיַּיִן  
מִיִּשְׁרִים אֲהַבִּיד:

MAG-88 BWR-10 NO FP6223-1/P11-3

JUDAISM - WIN 95

